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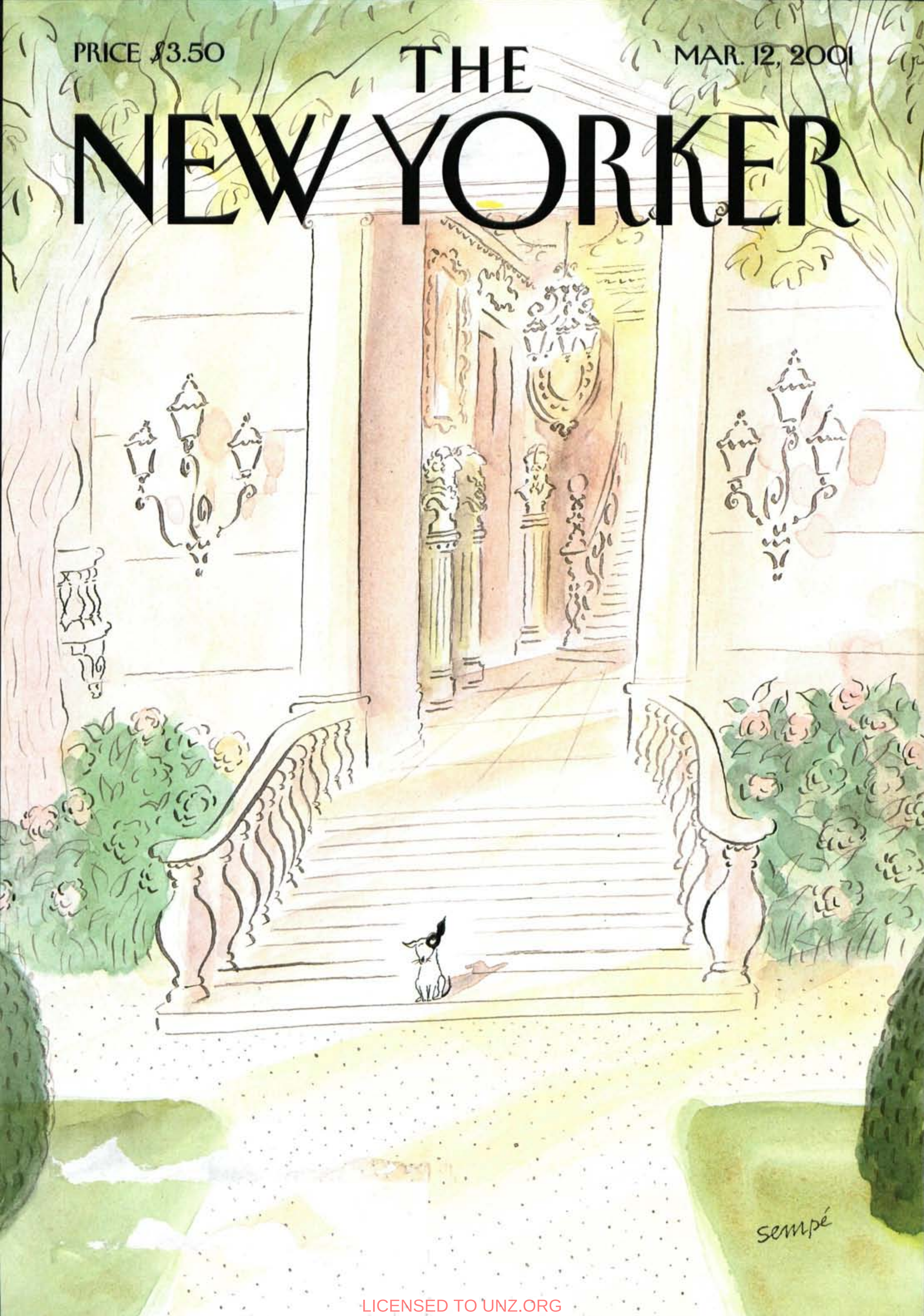

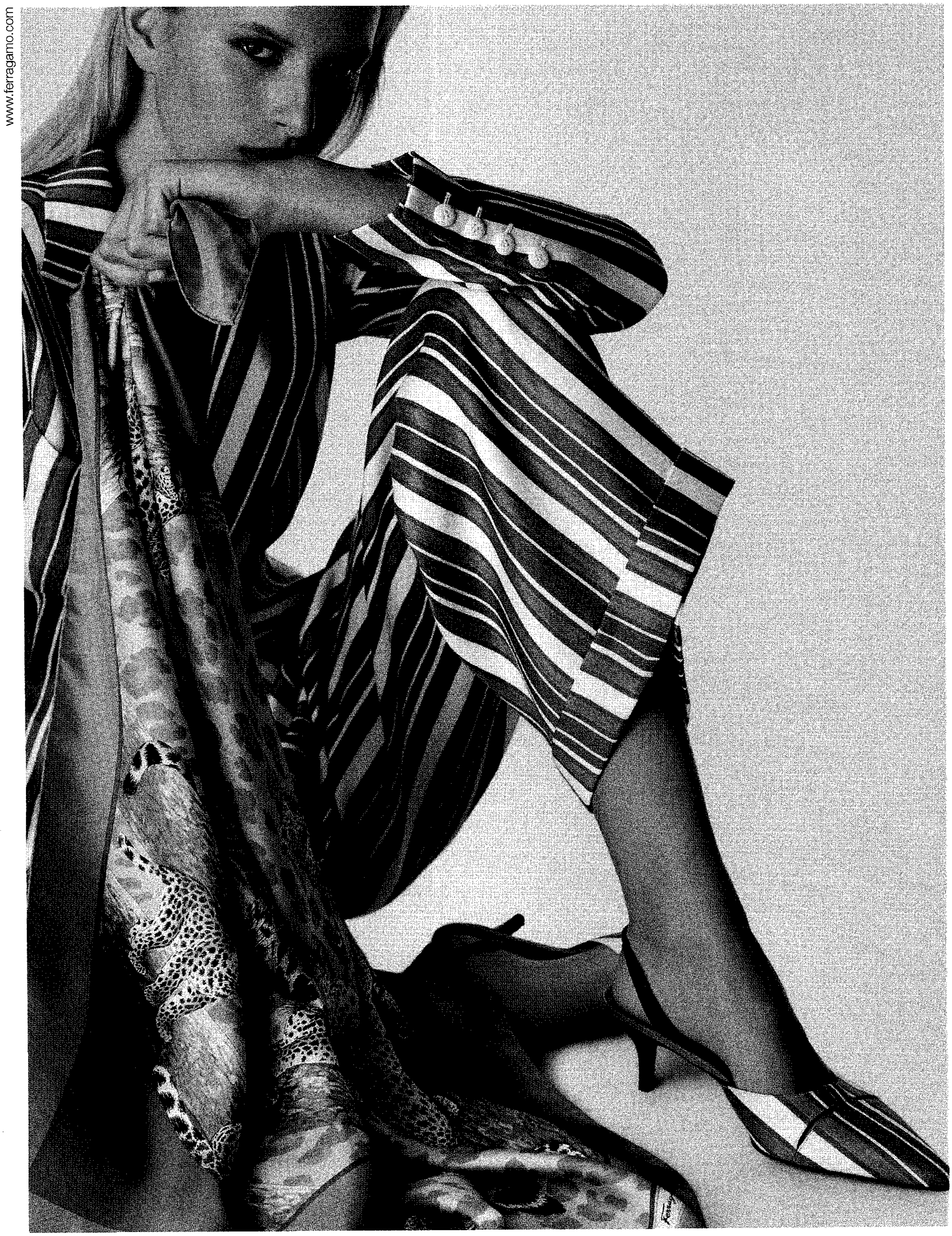
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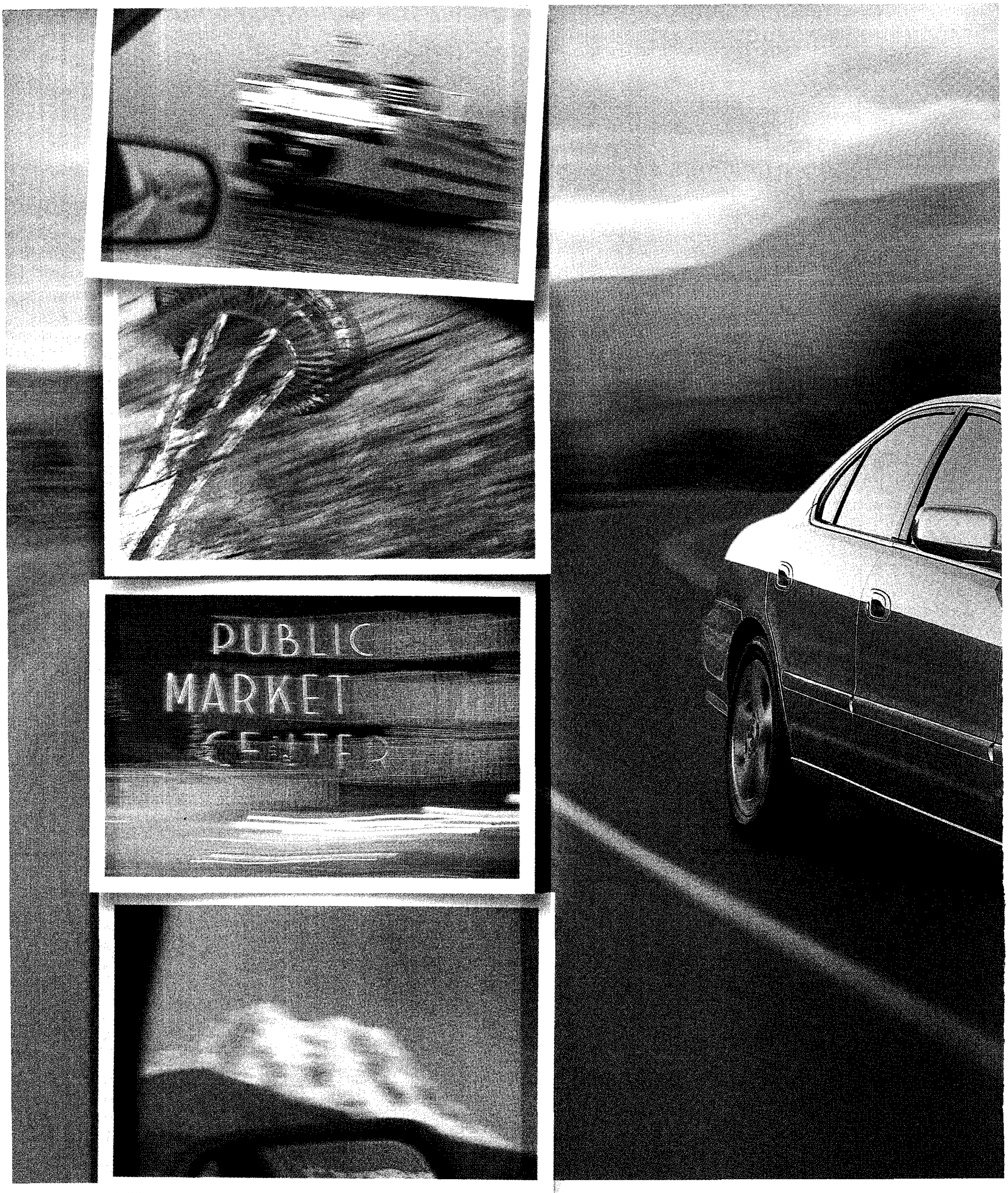

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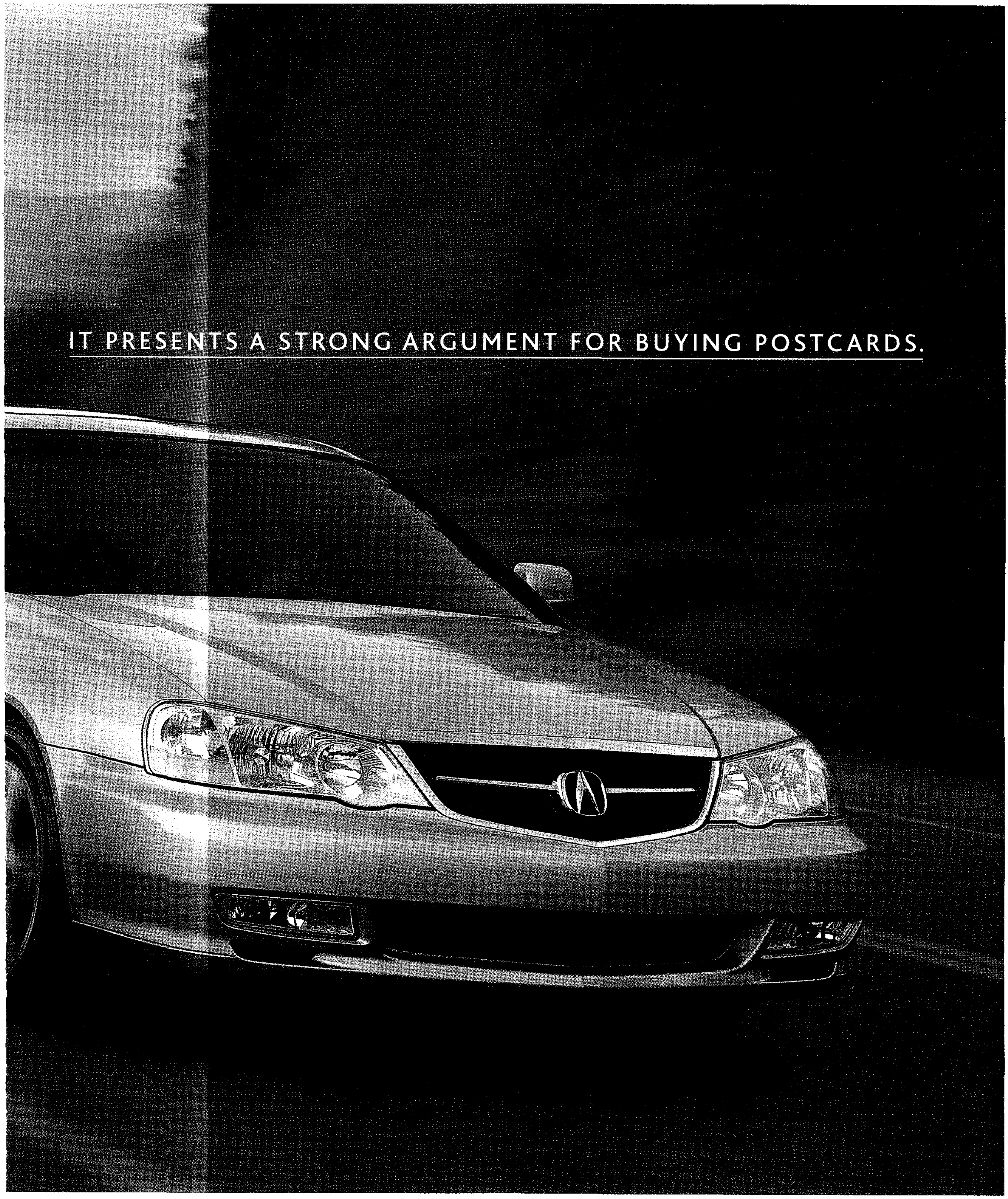
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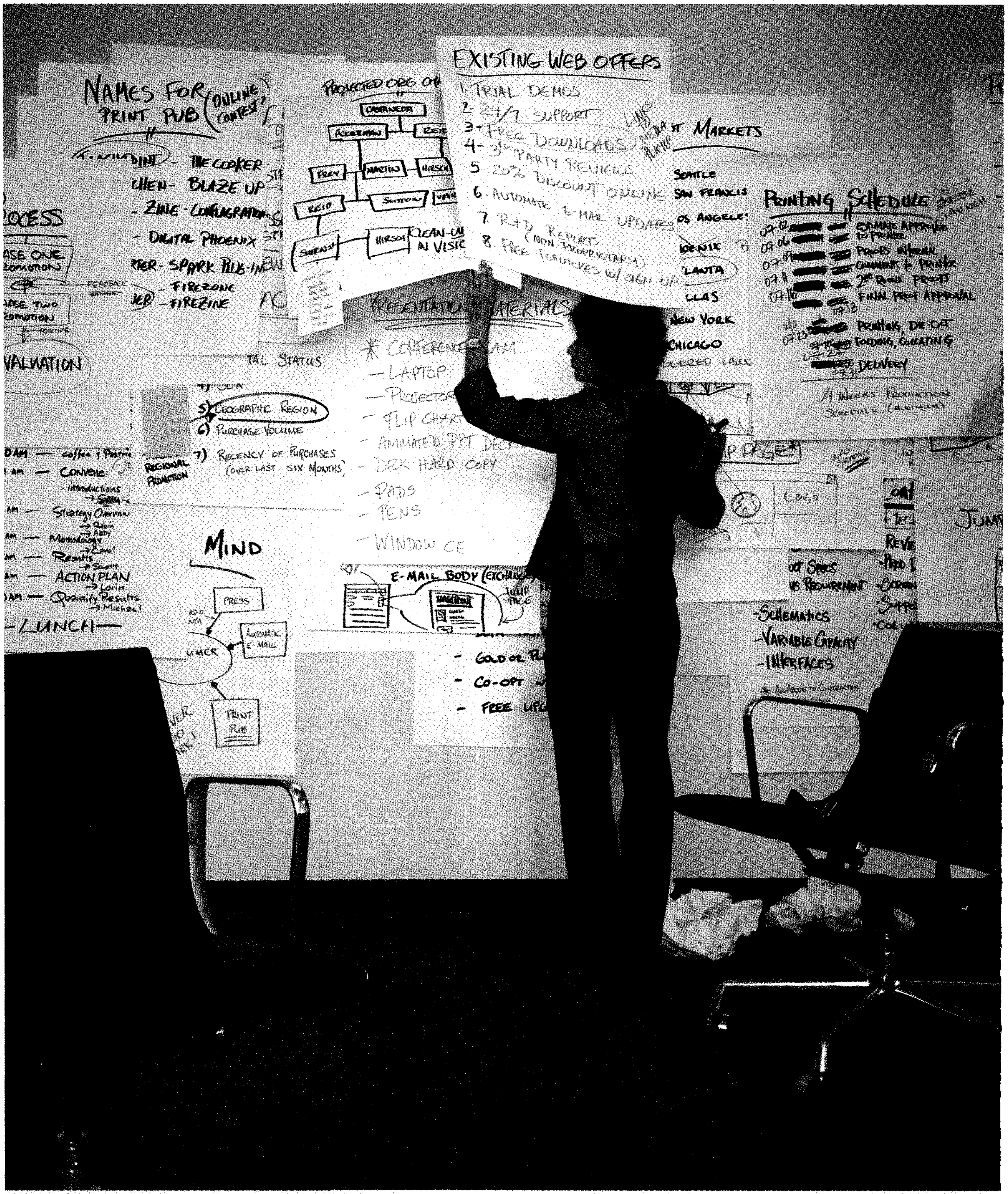
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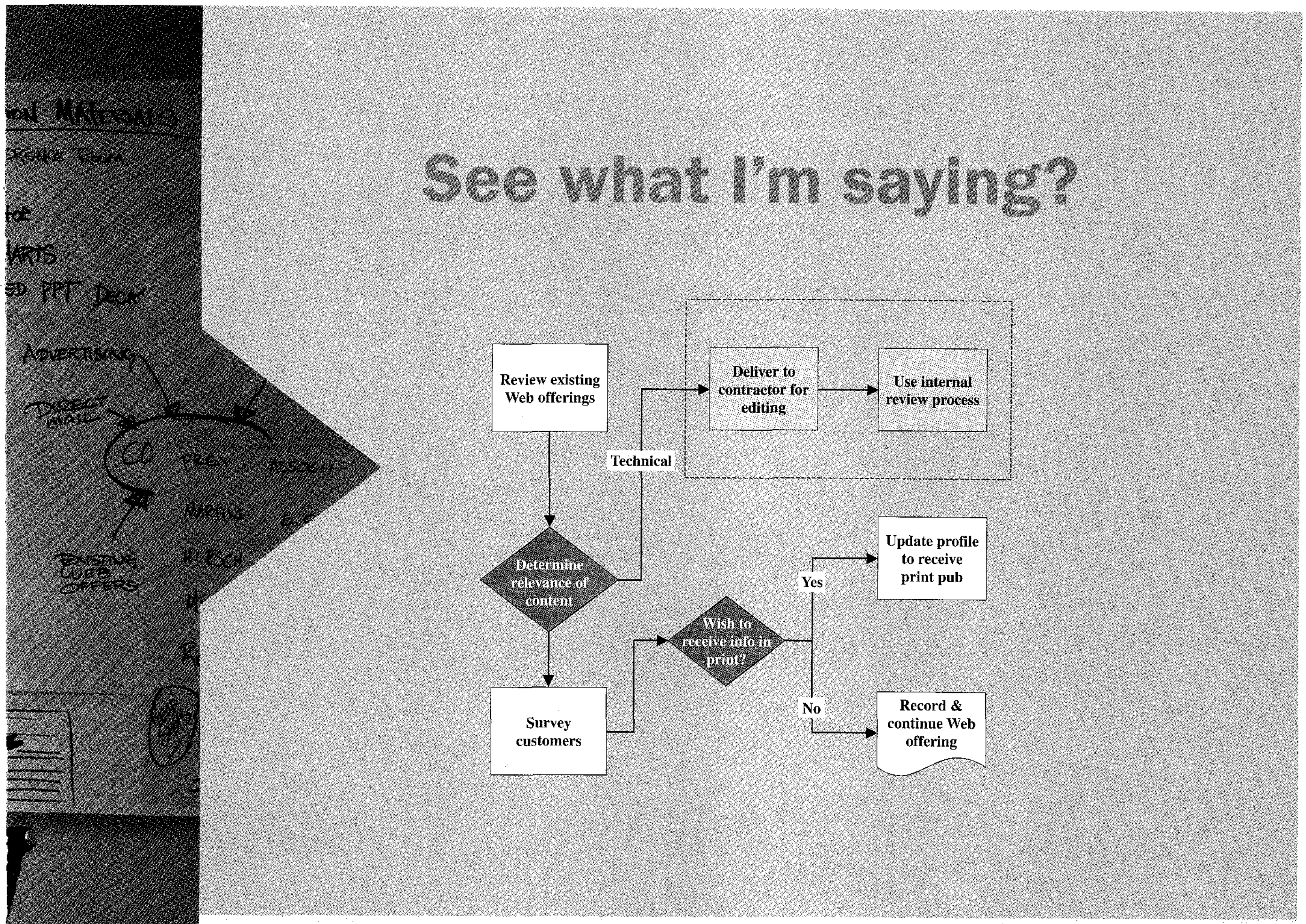
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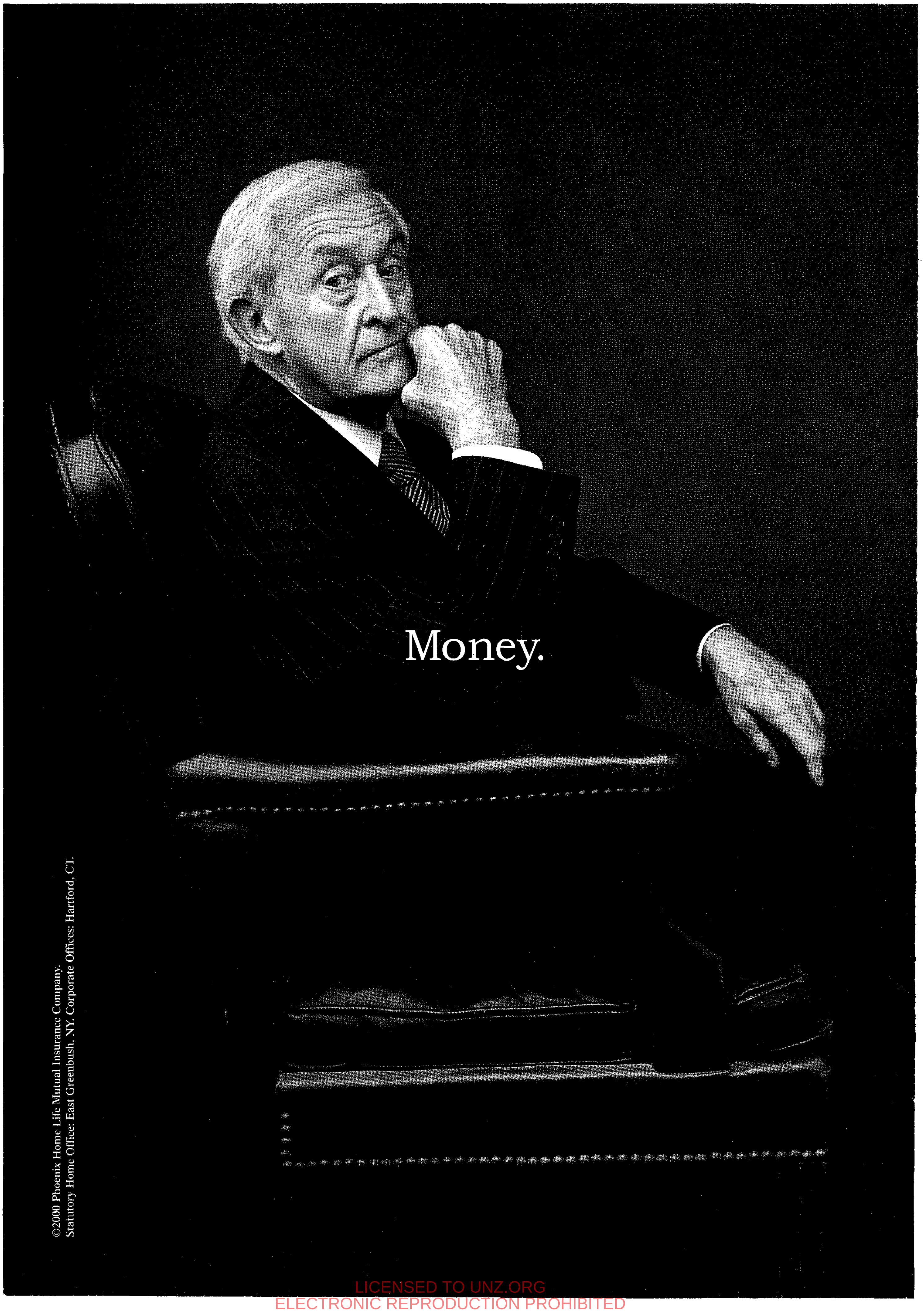

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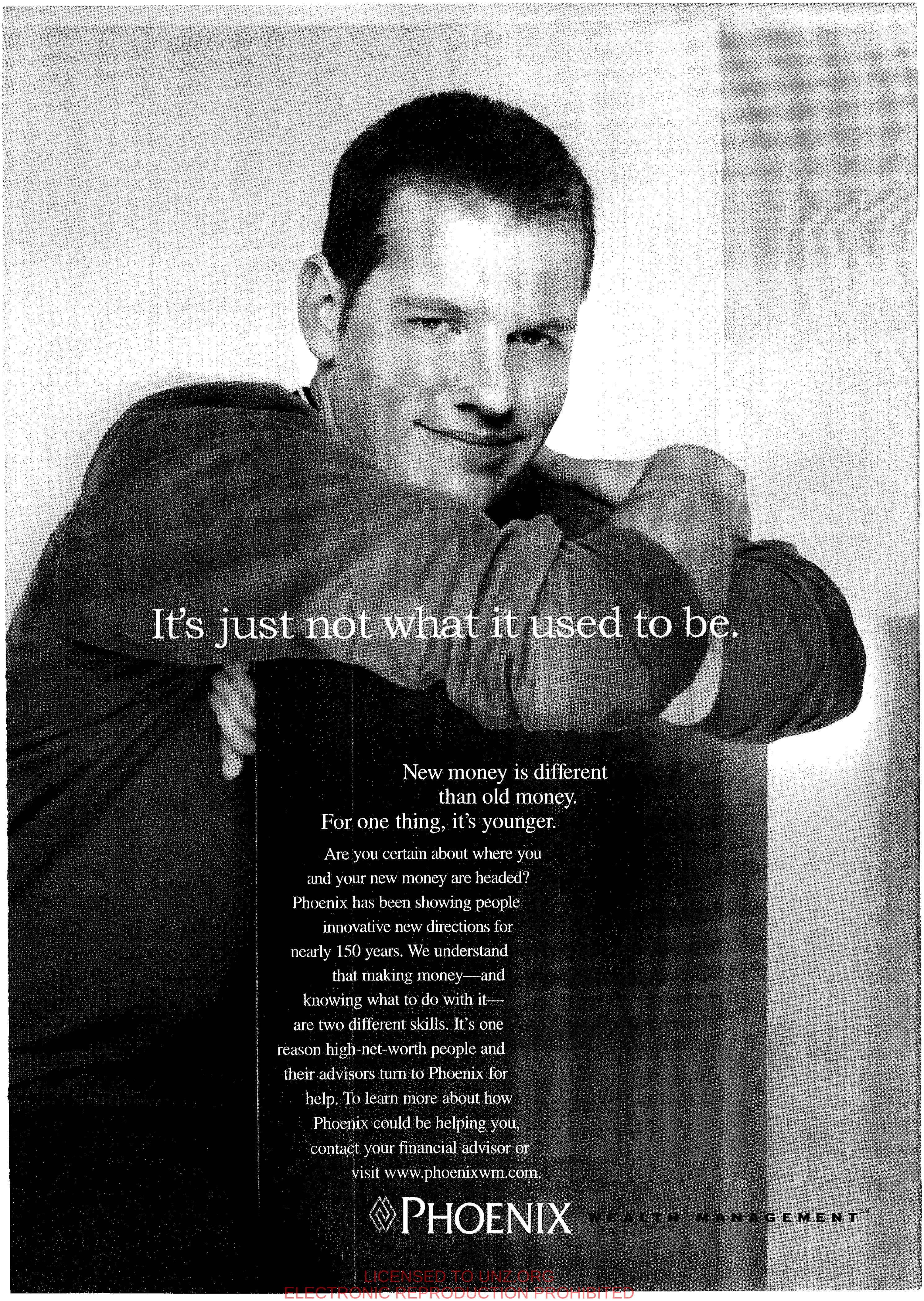
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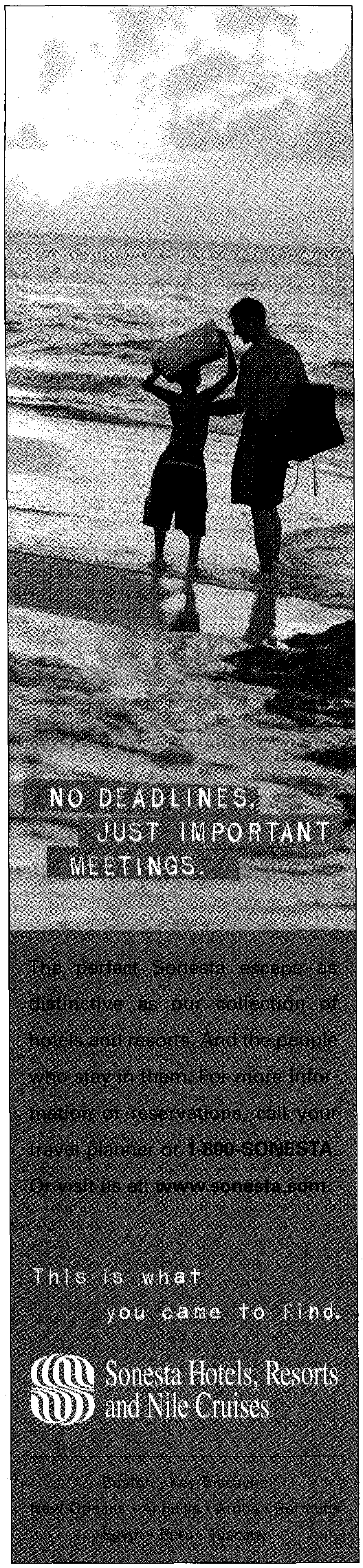
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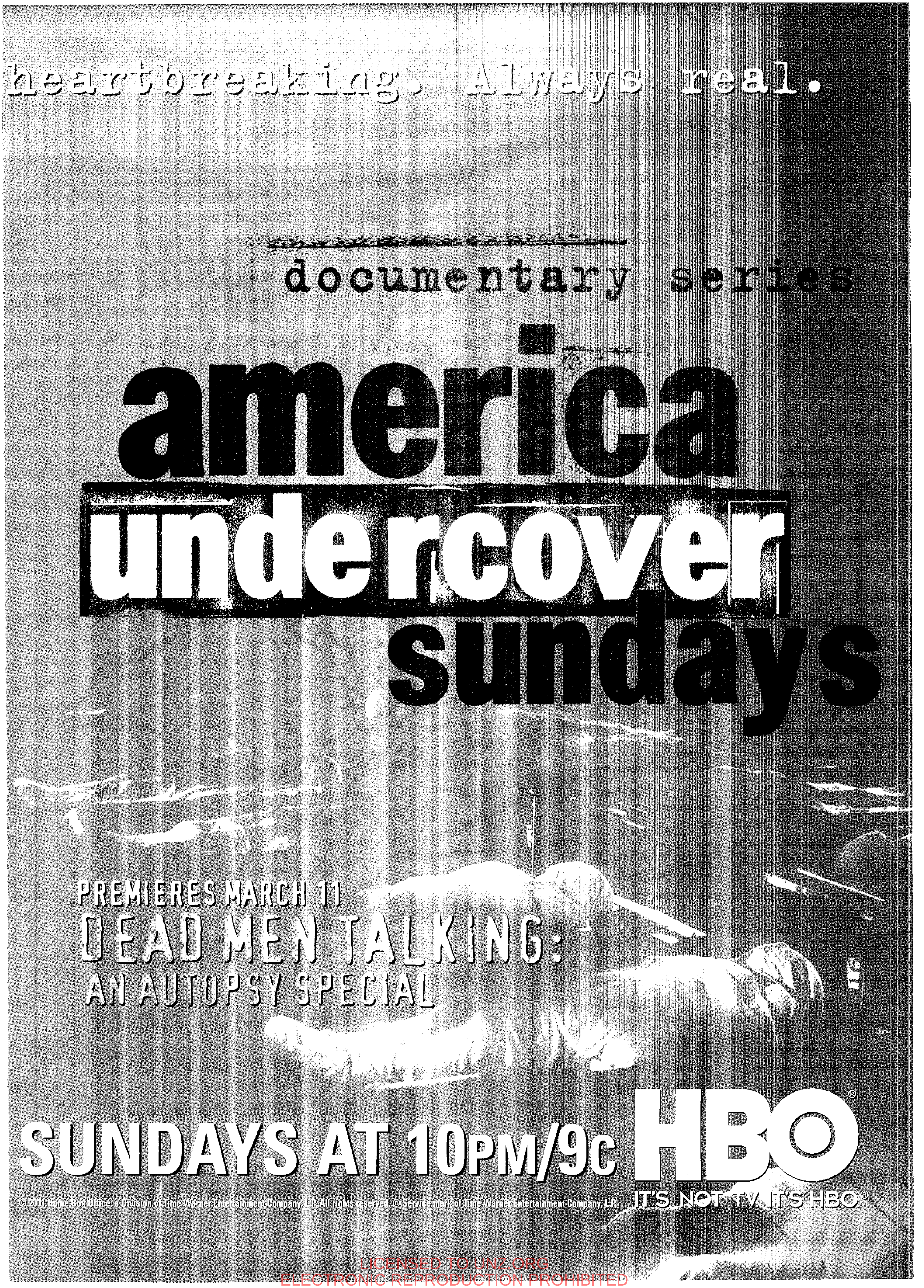
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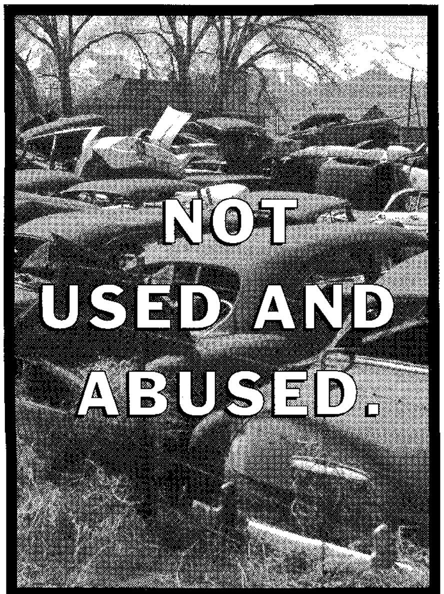

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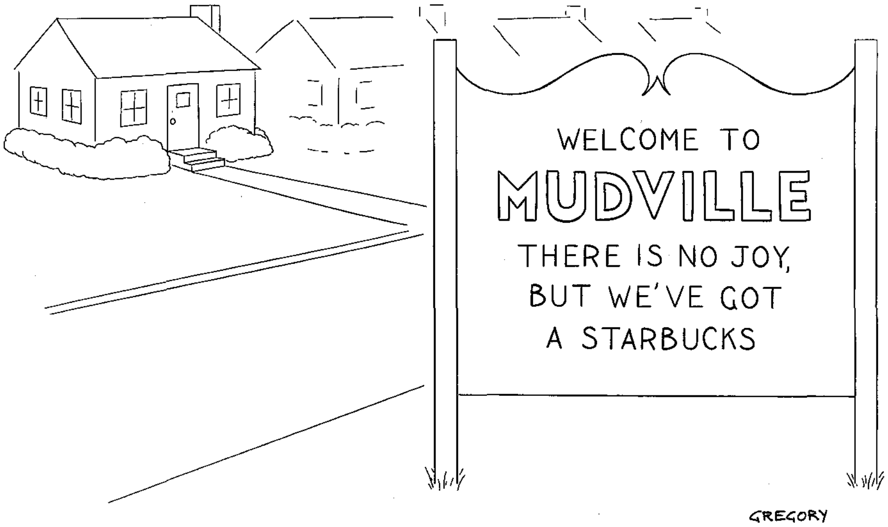
Roz Chast (The Back Page, p. 110) has been a regular contributor since 1978. Her latest book is "Rationalizations to Live By." ♦



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THE MAIL

PECULIAR INSTITUTIONS

In her conversation with Philip Hamburger, Mimi Bowling, of the New York Public Library, tells of how Thomas Jefferson "was infuriated when South Carolina and Georgia excised some passages condemning slavery" from the Declaration of Independence (The Talk of the Town, February 5th). What is not clear in this old story is that the passages were not, as one might think, an attack on slaveholding itself, or even on the Southern colonies. Instead, Jefferson first blamed King George III for American slavery—as if redcoats had forced slaves on unwilling planters—and then complained that the King, through his agents, was inciting slaves to revolt. That had some truth, but it also lent power to Samuel Johnson's stinging barb about hearing "the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of Negroes." Jefferson did dislike slavery, and the cut passages reveal his disquiet, but he wasn't willing to act on those feelings. His rage about the excisions from the Declaration amounted to an author's pique at being edited; our founding document is better without Jefferson's words on slavery.

Edward Countryman
University Distinguished Professor
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

As a former staff attorney for the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense Fund who practiced civil-rights law for a decade in Mississippi, I was struck by Louis Menand's comment, in his discussion of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling (Books, February 12th), that Thurgood Marshall "had a strategy; King had a dream," and that Marshall "accomplished a revolution" in constitutional law, while King unrealistically "raised expectations." Historians tend to fix on legal victories as epoch-changing turning points—especially today, when so much of our political life seems to take place in court. But, in fact, Marshall's strategy of bringing about integration through litigation was a failure. The South's response to the Brown decision had made a mockery of it; in 1965, for example, Mississippi still classified all schools as either "Negro" or "white." The legal fight was stalled until King's March on Washington provided the push for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This, and President Johnson's insistence on enforcement, jump-started desegregation. It was therefore King's "dream," not Marshall's "strategy," that accomplished real change in our schools. As Judge John Minor Wisdom wrote in 1966, "A national effort, bringing together Congress, the executive, and the judiciary may be able to make meaningful the right of Negro children to equal educational opportunities. The courts acting alone have failed."

Melvyn R. Leventhal
New York City

Adam Gopnik praises a Rikers Island school that, in an effort to combine rehabilitation and reform, prepares teenage prisoners, most of whom are black or Hispanic, for high-school-equivalency exams ("Rikers High," February 19th & 26th). But he does not note that, prior to a lawsuit brought by the Legal Aid Society in 1996, a significant proportion of the youths incarcerated at Rikers received no education whatsoever. Services are still lacking: a recent audit showed that more than a third of juvenile offenders held in New York State facilities are not receiving court-mandated drug treatment and counselling. Litigation should not be necessary—as it has been on Rikers Island—to force states and cities to provide humane and professional treatment for all incarcerated youths while there is still a chance to intervene.

Cathleen Clements
Chair, Social Welfare Law Committee
Association of the Bar of the City of New York
New York City

•

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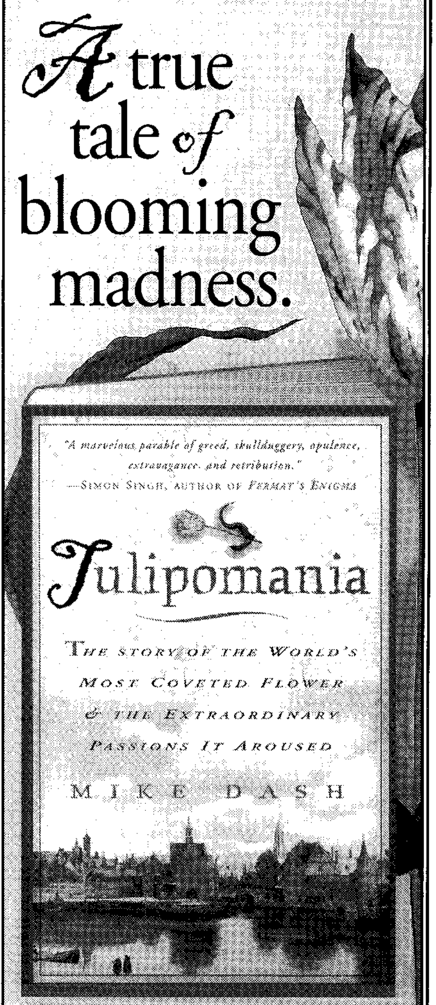
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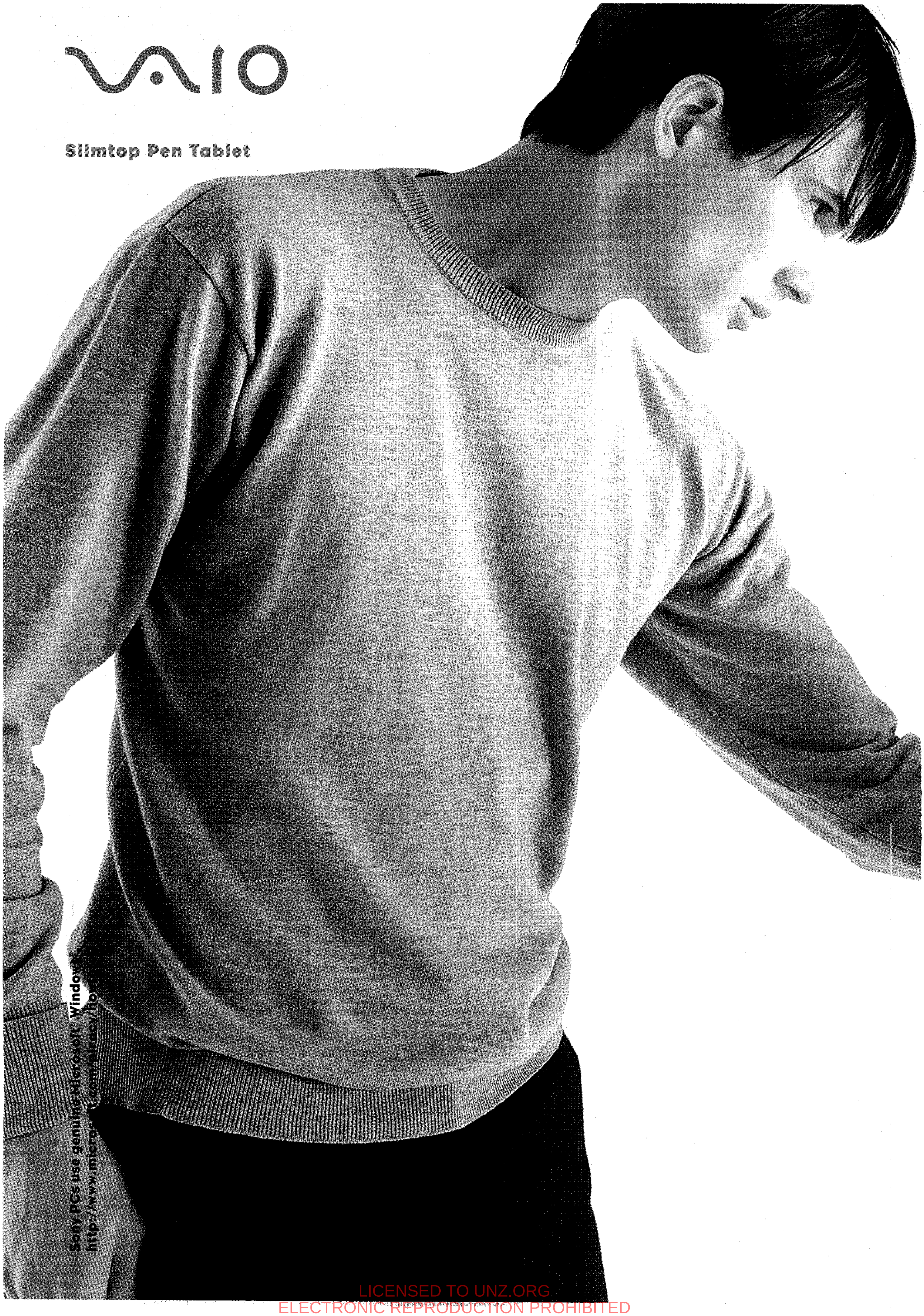
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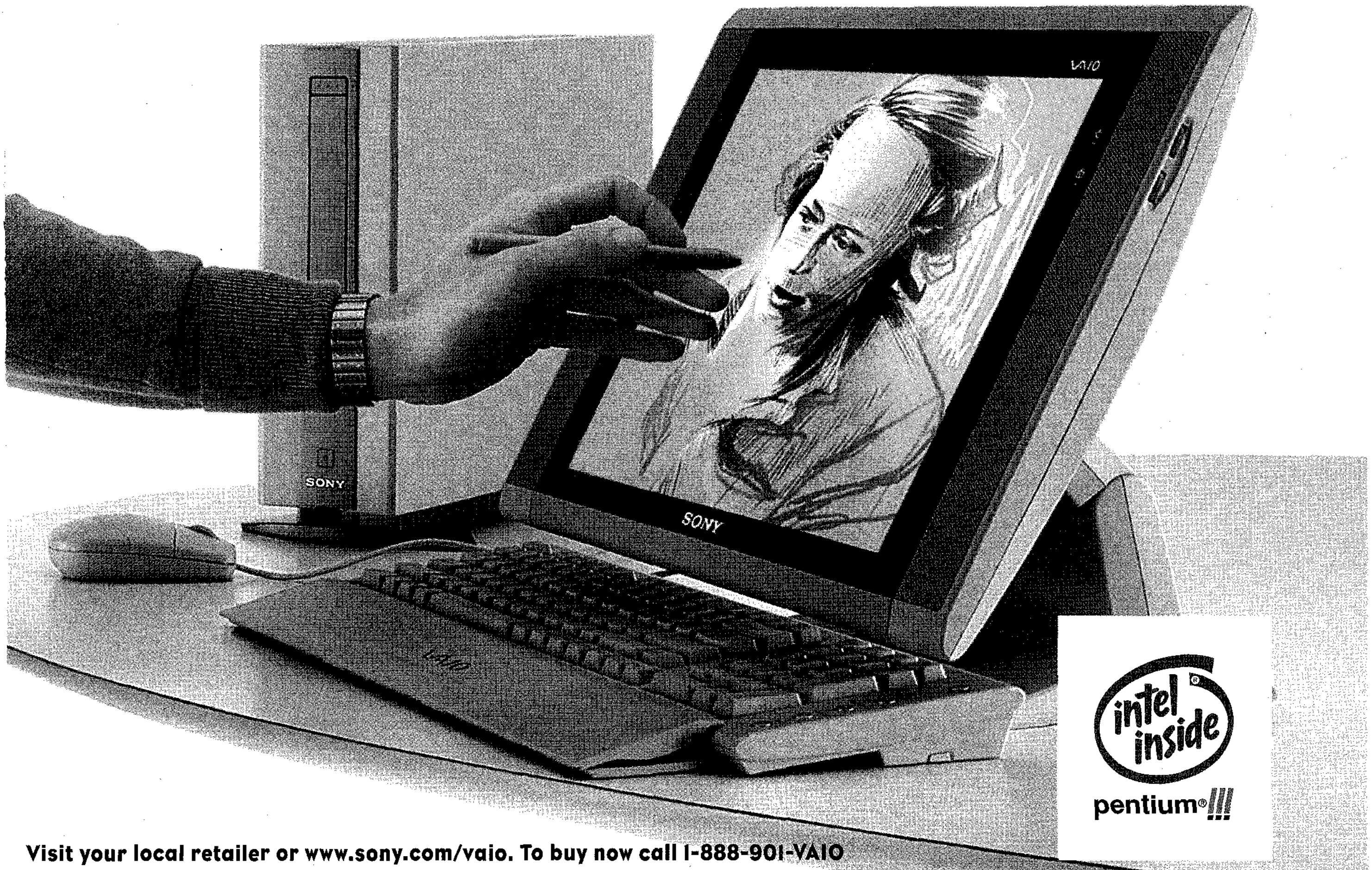

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BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL
A musical inspired by a tabloid story about a half-boy, half-nocturnal flying mammal discovered by some West Virginia teen-agers. Written by Keythe Farley and Brian Flemming, with music and lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe. In previews. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

THE BOOK OF LIZ
The Drama Dept. presents a new comedy by the Talent Family (David and Amy Sedaris), in which an unappreciated nun finds adventure when she flees her conventional life. Previews begin March 12. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

A CLASS ACT
Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With songs by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. Mr. Price is the director. In previews through March 10. Opens March 11 at 6:30. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

DESIGN FOR LIVING
Alan Cumming, Jennifer Ehle, and Dominic West are the dissolute trio in Noel Coward's 1932 comedy. Joe Mantello is the director. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER
The 1939 stage adaptation of Stephen Vincent Benét's 1937 story wraps up the first season of City Center's Voices! series, dedicated to readings of rarely revived American plays. One performance only, March 13 at 8. (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

FOLLIES
A Roundabout Theatre Company revival of James Goldman and Stephen Sondheim's 1971 musical, starring Blythe Danner, Gregory Harrison, Judith Ivey, and Treat Williams. Matthew Warchus is the director. Previews begin March 8. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE INVENTION OF LOVE
Tom Stoppard's latest play stars Richard Easton and Robert Sean Leonard, who portray the poet A. E. Housman at the end of his life and as a young man. Jack O'Brien is the director. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

I WILL BEAR WITNESS
A stage version of the diaries of Victor Klemperer, a German Jew who recorded his life under the Third Reich. George Bartenieff, who portrays Klemperer, and Karen Malpede, who directs, collaborated on the adaptation. In previews through March 10. Opens March 11 at 7. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210.)

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JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG
Maximilian Schell and George Grizzard lead the cast in a National Actors Theatre production of Abby Mann's drama, which he based on his 1957 teleplay and subsequent novel. John Tillinger is the director. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6280.)

LOBBY HERO
A new play by Kenneth Lonergan, about a security guard, his supervisor, two cops, and a murder investigation. Mark Brokaw is the director. In previews through March 11. Opens March 13 at 7. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

NEWYORKERS
A satirical revue about life in Manhattan, by Glenn Slater (lyrics) and Stephen Weiner (music). Christopher Ashley is the director. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

NUYORICAN VOICES
A trio of plays by Latino playwrights ("Miriam's Flowers," by Migdalia Cruz, "Giants Have Us in Their Books," by José Rivera, and "Unmerciful Good Fortune," by Edwin Sanchez), performed in rotating repertory. March 13 at 8: "Miriam's Flowers." (INTAR, 508 W. 53rd St. 279-4200.)

TEN UNKNOWNS
In Jon Robin Baitz's new drama, Donald Sutherland stars as a reclusive artist living in Mexico, whose life is disrupted by three unwanted visitors (Julianna Margulies, Denis O'Hare, and Justin Kirk). Daniel Sullivan is the director. Two previews on March 7. Opens March 8 at 6:45. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE ABDUCTION PROJECT
The multimedia troupe Collision Theory's latest project, set in the suburbs in the fifties, examines the notion of extraterrestrial contact in our culture. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes March 17.)

BOBBIE BOLAND
A former beauty queen goes into battle mode when a younger woman pursues her husband, in a comedy by Nancy Hasty set in nineteen-sixties Florida. (Arclight, 152 W. 71st St. 279-4200.)

BOY GETS GIRL
Rebecca Gilman's latest play deals with a journalist whose life is turned upside down after she rejects a blind date. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/5/01.) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

CANNIBAL! THE MUSICAL, LIVE ONSTAGE
From the creators of "South Park" (Trey Parker and Matt Stone), a stage version of their 1995 film. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. 539-7686.)

CARTAS: A NUN IN LOVE
A stage adaptation of the seventeenth-century "Lettres de la Religieuse Portugaise," said to be correspondence from a Portuguese nun to a French officer who deserted her, translated and performed by Myriam Cyr. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 529-4530.)

DESPAIR'S BOOK OF DREAMS AND THE SOMETIMES RADIO
Austin's Vortex Theatre is in town to present a musical-theatre piece by Kirk Smith, about a failed poet and a mysterious antique radio. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202. Closes March 11.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Neil Simon's new comedy is set in an opulent restaurant in Paris, and his six characters—three divorced couples—are not the usual Simon-Americans of his "Suite" plays. They are French, or are meant to be. Still, the play is essentially traditional fare; the running, or limping, gags are in ready supply, and the secondhand shtick, often in the form of aeons-old alimony jokes, flows freely along this Boulevard of Broken Marriages. (11/6/00) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DOGEATERS
The Philippines in the eighties is the setting for Jessica Hagedorn's play, which she based on her 1990 novel of the same title. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes March 18.)

THE DOUBLE BASS
Patrick Süskind's drama explores the frustrations of a musician employed by a West German orchestra. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes March 11.)

THE FLORIDA PROJECT
Alligator wrestlers and mermaids collide in Tory Vazquez's play with dance, starring Juliana Francis and Richard Maxwell. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave. at 9th St. 477-5288. Closes March 18.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
These days, ridiculing Broadway is like shooting fish in a barrel, so it's amazing that the latest version of Gerard Alessandrini's long-running satirical revue manages to fire off as many good ones as it does. Alessandrini can always be counted on for

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a smart laugh, but not all of the numbers here are up to his usual high standards of comic cruelty. Thank goodness the wonderful Christine Pedi is still in the show; her loopy, loving imitations of yesteryear's biggies—Elaine Stritch, Liza Minnelli, Ethel Merman, and Barbra Streisand—are more than worth the trip and the price of a ticket. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
Terrence McNally and David Yazbek's musical version of the 1997 movie, about a group of unemployed factory workers who try to earn some cash by stripping, has all the spirit and charm of the original but on a much larger, pizzazzier scale. If you don't find yourself laughing consistently (and tearing up occasionally), well, then, maybe you don't *deserve* to see six men prancing around in red G-strings. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

HIGH DIVE
A one-woman comedy about the perils of family vacations, written and performed by Leslie Ayvazian and presented by the MCC Theatre. (120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes March 25.)

IF IT WAS EASY . . .
In Ward Morehouse III and Stewart F. Lane's backstage comedy, the Mob offers hard-to-refuse financial help to the producers of a show called "Sinatra: The Musical." (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

ISN'T IT ROMANTIC
The Worth Street Theatre Company's staging of Wendy Wasserstein's 1983 comedy, directed by Jeff Cohen. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St., at West Broadway. 206-1515.)

JANE EYRE
John Caird and Paul Gordon's musical is respectful of and faithful to Brontë's original, but it needs to be brilliant and piercing, and it isn't. Though the show's book is a fair job, the music is schmaltzy, and the modern stage devices—the endless projections of trees and sky may make you feel like you're watching the Weather Channel—don't quite bring Brontë to life. The appealing cast is led by Marla Schaffel, who is the very picture of the Jane Eyre in your mind's eye. Directed by Mr. Caird and Scott Schwartz. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

LEAVING QUEENS
Kate Moira Ryan and Kim D. Sherman's musical traces three generations of an Irish-American family living in New York City. (Women's Project Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200. Closes March 18.)

MOMMA
In her one-woman show, Siobhan Fallon portrays a bus driver from rural New York who travels to Manhattan to visit a fertility herbalist. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes March 24.)

NOW THAT COMMUNISM IS DEAD, MY LIFE FEELS EMPTY
Richard Foreman's forty-eighth play has many of the whacked-out elements audiences have come to expect from the father of downtown theatre—a disorienting set loaded with veiled signifiers, nubile women whose semi-sadomasochistic garb is offset by intellectual-nerd glasses; a gorilla; an outright air of menace; and characters who seem both alienated and—especially lately—somehow perfectly at home in it all. It has little to do with the fall of Communism, of course, but it also has very little new or challenging about it. Foreman's plays used to be an enigmatic, exhilarating blow to the brain. With this latest work, the formula has got so comfortable that it seems like shtick. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY
In Edward Albee's new play, an older couple provide a harsh taste of what life has in store for a young couple with a new baby: the ravages of adulthood, the tidal wave of troubles and injuries that come with time. Brian Murray and Marian Seldes, two veterans who are rarely less than riveting, make the most of Albee's sharp, enigmatic writing; their highly stylized, virtuosic performances here are stunning. David Esbjornson directed. (2/19 & 26/01) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

PROOF
The young playwright David Auburn's drama about the possible link between genius and mental illness stars Mary-Louise Parker as the daughter of a brilliant but unstable University of Chicago mathematician. Parker's character appears to have similar gifts and, possibly, similar troubles. Auburn has real depth and a real voice, and he has taken on some biggies here, but in the end you wish the play were a little richer, a little less simply resolved. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

RACE
Ferdinand Bruckner's 1933 drama about a German medical student who leaves his Jewish girlfriend to join the Nazi Party. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210. Closes March 11.)

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Rather than a revival of Richard O'Brien's 1973 musical, a glam tribute to fifties horror flicks, Christopher Ashley's production is an unsexy and oddly earnest homage to the 1975 cult-movie adaptation. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

Regina Taylor, in "Urban Zulu Mambo," at the Signature Theatre.

MATTHIAS CLAMER

ROSMERSHOLM
The Century Center's Ibsen series continues with the playwright's rarely produced psychological drama. (111 E. 15th St. 982-6782. Closes March 17.)

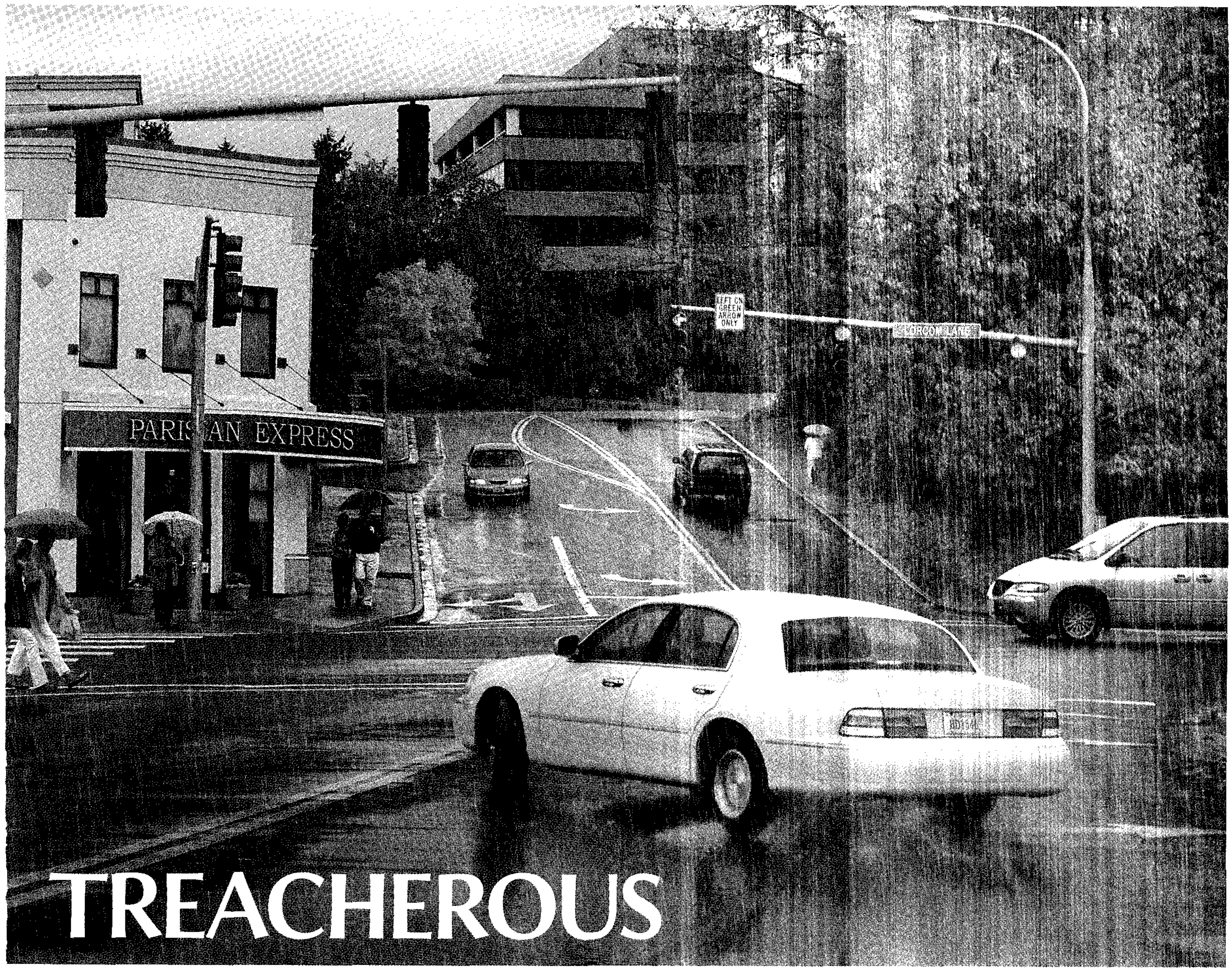
SAVED
The 1965 political drama by Edward Bond, staged by Theatre for a New Audience. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
Lily Tomlin is back on Broadway in the one-woman, thirteen-character show written for her by her longtime collaborator, Jane Wagner, and what's not to love about that? Tomlin is terrific—moving, funny, and as lithe and vibrant as she was when she first performed the show here, fifteen years ago. This is a chance to see a remarkable life force in action. (11/27/00) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes March 11.)

SEUSSICAL
For all the whimsy of Theodor Geisel's doggerel, what's missing in this relentlessly cute musical by the team of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty is mayhem and magic. With the exception of one gentle and winning performance—by Kevin Chamberlin as Horton the Elephant, who gets conned into hatching an egg—it's a show with curiously little charm. (12/25/00 & 1/1/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

SITTING PRETTY
In the British playwright Amy Rosenthal's comedy-drama, Aviva Jane Carlin portrays a middle-aged woman who takes a job as a nude model for artists. (Hypothetical Theatre, 344 E. 14th St. 206-1515. Closes March 11.)

A SKULL IN CONNEMARA
The second installment in the Irish playwright Martin McDonagh's Leenane trilogy (which in-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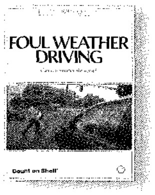
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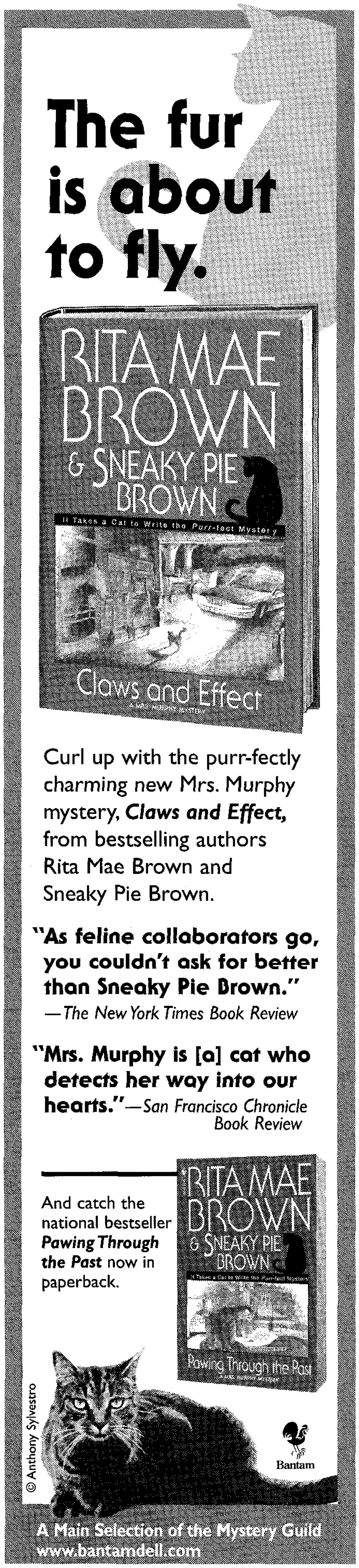

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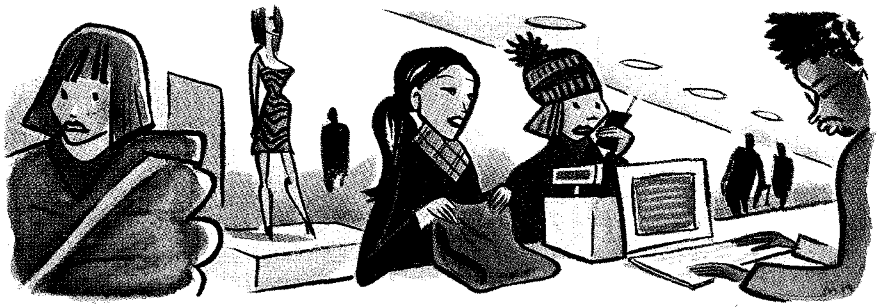
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

An Afternoon with Mr. Mickey



A few Saturdays ago, in the thick of New York's Fashion Week, Mickey Boardman, an editor at *Paper* and a fellow known around town for his open-minded, if uncompromising, approach to personal style, broke away from the rarefied world of the runways to visit **H&M** (640 Fifth Ave.; 489-0390), the breathtakingly inexpensive Swedish department store diagonally across the street from Cartier. Mr. Mickey is renowned not only for his sartorial choices but also for his cheerful nature. On this particular afternoon, he was wearing twinned turquoise-and-lime Missoni sweaters, canvas trousers from the A.P.C. sample sale, Keds with glittery ankle socks, and a necklace that looked like a triple strand of Cheerios bought at an Indian store in Warsaw, and carrying a vintage Pierre Cardin ladies' plastic tote.

Just inside H&M's front doors, Mr. Mickey got excited about a shirtdress in shades of bronze and chocolate brown ($59), a *jolie-laide* approach to dressing which was surely meant to be viewed with more than a trace of irony. "It's kind of Gucci two seasons ago!" he said. "It's very Southern California housewife who takes pottery lessons!" Three seconds later, a woolly black-and-white-checked vest provoked an equally energetic response: "It's like John Bartlett when he did houndstooth, but here it's with a little bit of Lurex, and it's made in Mauritius! I love a sleeveless Lurex houndstooth turtleneck for $19 that's made in Mauritius!"

This season, the buyers at H&M seem to have made a particular commitment to animal themes, which appear in everything from pussycat-bowed python-patterned blouses to zebra-striped dresses to crocodile-embossed jeans. A pair of reptilian trousers in the men's department were so outré that even Mickey was impressed. "O.K.! Suède printed-snake pants!" he said. "But, still, regular guys won't feel threatened, because, I mean, there's lots of regular stuff here too, like those tartan pants. They're sort of punk Vivienne Westwood, but also very Connecticut fireside with a lumberjack feeling."

On an escalator that was crowded enough for a Jacques Tati film, Mickey reflected on H&M's chic bone-colored walls and low black ottomans. "There's something about this space that feels almost Prada—I mean, Club Monaco has it on a certain level, too. It's not so American feeling, or maybe that's just my jaded jet-set opinion." Upstairs, an aristocratic blonde sailed by, wearing a navy cashmere polo coat and carrying a shopping bag from Thomas Pink. She was clearly not in the market for a cheetah-print polyester halter ($15), but Mickey wondered if perhaps she might like a peony-colored leather jacket ($89) that he pronounced "very Carolina Herrera, especially if you wore it with a fur collar and a stiletto boot! Very ladies who lunch." He paused. "Rich people love a bargain, too!"

Invariably, the low prices and infinite variety laid waste to Mr. Mickey's editorial objectivity. "Ooh, now we're talking—chain belts." The soft light surrounding the three-dollar pearl necklaces in the women's accessories department cast a glow, and he suddenly turned thoughtful. "Maybe I should get two chain belts," he said to no one in particular. "And part of me thinks I want a sequinned bag, too." Fondling a rectangle covered with square paillettes the color of gold coins ($13), Mr. Mickey declared, "I think I should get it. I could always hang it from the belt."

—*Lynn Yaeger*

MARCELLUS HALL

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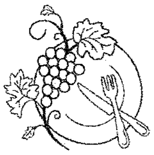

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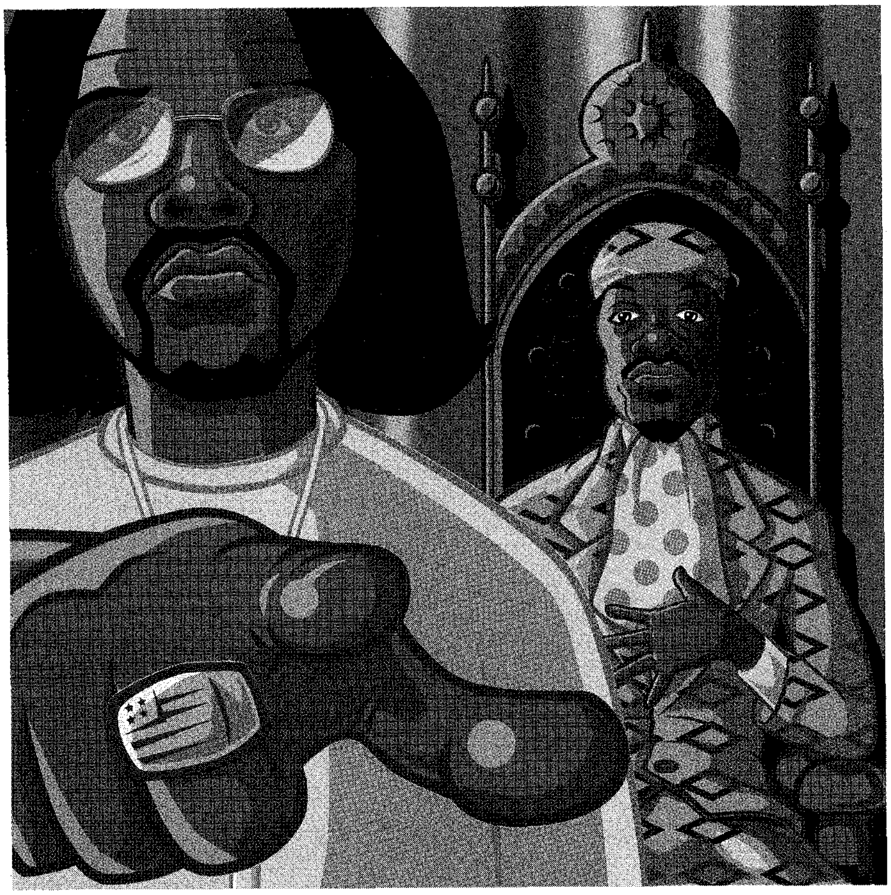
VISA

For more information call The New Yorker's Direct Response Group at 1.877.843.6967 cludes "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" and "The Lonesome West"), presented by the Roundabout Theatre Company. Gordon Edelstein is the director. (3/5/01) (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

STRICTLY PERSONAL
Jake Feinberg's comedy about post-divorce dating. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St., near Sixth Ave. 239-6200.)

SUBURB
In Robert Cohen and David Javerbaum's musical, Stuart (James Ludwig) wants to leave Manhattan for the suburbs, but his wife (Jacquelyn Piro) is not so sure. It's hard to tell whether the authors intended to write a satire on the cultural divide between city and country or a relationship drama, and the cloying ballads and up-tempo songs about house buying, mallgoing, and lawn mowing inadvertently make a case for staying in—or even moving to—New York City. Only Alix Korey, as a sharky real-estate agent, overcomes the saccharine material. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200. Closes March 25.)



The Atlanta hip-hop powerhouse OutKast, at Madison Square Garden.

MICHAEL WELDON

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES
Marivaux's 1733 romantic farce. (Producers Club, 358 W. 44th St. 279-4200. Closes March 11.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa, which begins in 1965 and continues through the following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
As Marjorie Taub, an Upper West Side culture vulture on the verge of a nervous breakdown ("To quote Kafka, 'I am a cage in search of a bird'"), the dexterous Linda Lavin makes Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst dazzle. In her pretentiousness, however, she is a gaudy incarnation of the boulevard's contempt for ideas. In fact, as Marjorie herself admits, she has never had "even one original thought." In this piece of slick flimflam, there is attitude but no character, laughter but no insight, action but no plot, suffering but no pain. What we have here, in other words, is a Broadway hit. (3/20/00) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THEATRE OF LIGHT
For this symphony of light, puppetry, and sound, Rudi Stern (whose designs in the nineteen-sixties accompanied Timothy Leary's Psychedelic Celebrations and concerts by the Doors) executes eleven different compositions, in which two thousand hand-painted slides (splashes of color, photocollages, and other abstract imagery) are flashed on three revolving disk-shaped screens, in synch with wildly eclectic music. After a while, the themeless pieces become repetitive, but when all their elements come together the effect is undeniably entrancing (and would no doubt be enhanced by mind-altering substances). (Flamboyan Theatre, Soto Velez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St., between Delancey and Rivington Sts. 279-4200.)

URBAN ZULU MAMBO
Regina Taylor performs short works by Kia Corthron, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Ntozake Shange, in a show she conceived in honor of the playwright Adrienne Kennedy. (Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes March 25.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

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Marquis, Broadway at 45th St.
307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St.
254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

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Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

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Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E.,
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at 14th St. 239-6200.

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Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St.,
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Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St.
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Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE MUSIC MAN
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

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Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

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Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

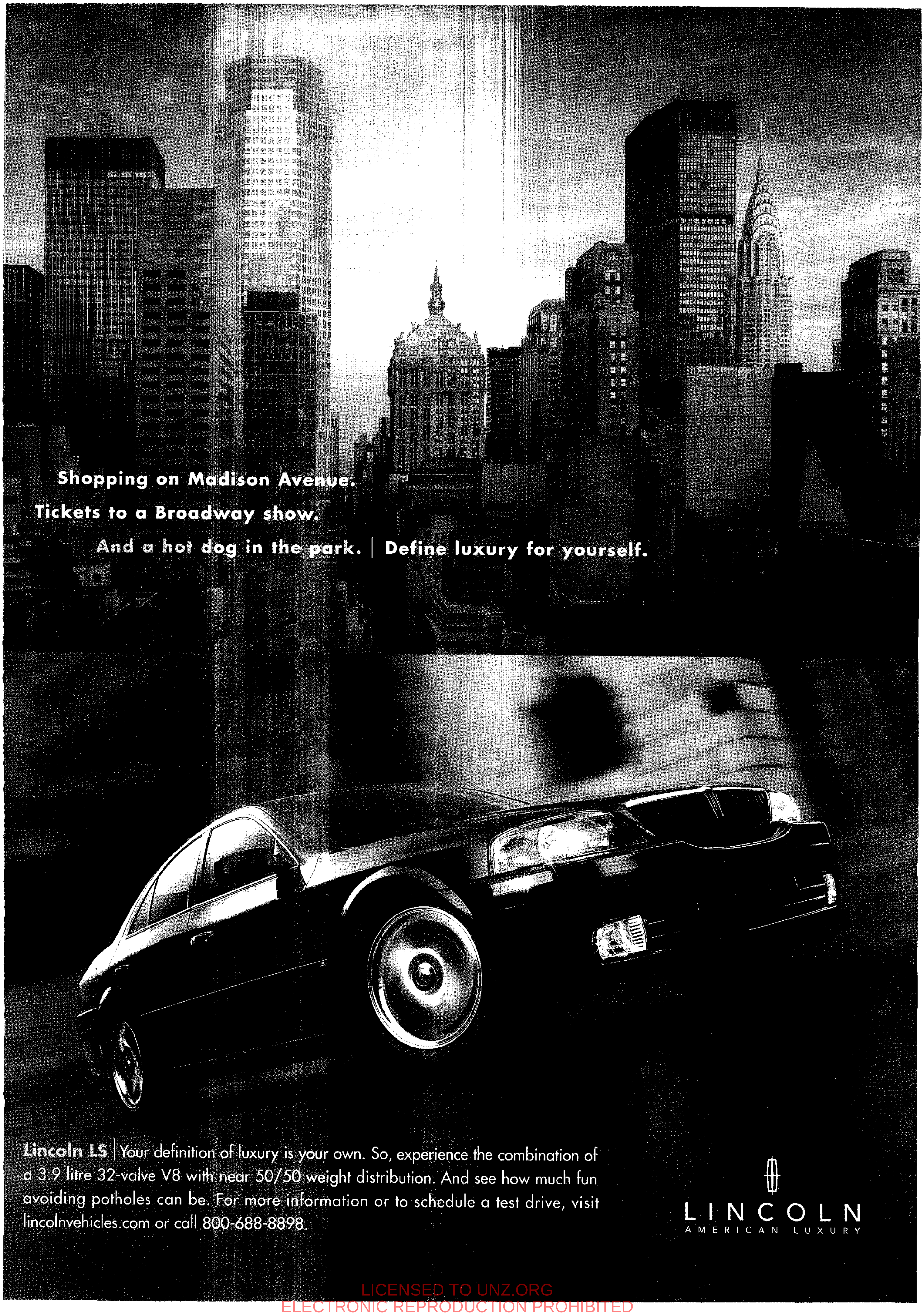
DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
As a dancer, Paul Taylor could make his gangliness look terrifying. As a choreographer, he uses lyric prettiness and macabre ugliness to equally unanticipated effect. In "Musical Offering," from 1986, pristine arrangements of gearlike limbs, stiff-legged jumps, and the rush of scything arms build toward an unexpected melancholy. His new work, "Fiends Angelical," is a ritualistic dance that casts primeval forces as cartoons: a priestess enters transcendental states by means of speedy hip-hop movements. In the current company, the redhead Michael Trusnovec is a standout; he makes Taylor's odd reversals mesmerizing. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. March 6-9 at 8, March 10 at 2 and 8, and March 11 at 3 and 7:30.)

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
The company opens its three-week Brooklyn season with two evenings of repertory works. March 6 and March 10 at 7:30: "Sang-Froid," "Home," and "Falling Down Stairs." March 7 and March 9 at 7:30: "Lucky Charms," "Bedtime," "Beautiful Day," and "Gloria." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Through March 25.)

JAZZDANCE BY DANNY BURACZESKI
For "21st Century Stride," the eight-member troupe performs with the pianist Peter Jones; they conclude with "Ezekiel's Wheel," set to a composition by Philip Hamilton, and "Song Awakened." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 6 at 7, March 7-9 at 8, March 10 at 2 and 8, and March 11 at 2 and 7:30.)

NEIL GREENBERG
Greenberg says that he has become known as "that guy who uses supertitles"; they're projected onto a screen above the performers. "This is the last material I made before my brother died," says one projection in 1994's astoundingly unmawkish "Not-About-AIDS-Dance" as the dancers go about their business below. Another says, "This dance is my latest immortality project. I wonder if it will work." Greenberg's judicious use of the device serves as a powerful reminder that art will neither forget the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life outside nor adequately address it. "Sad, isn't it?" he says. But, with his own viral load now undetectable, his recent work has become less sad—and the supertitles are mainly gone. This season, the biographical annotations they supplied have been incorporated into the movement itself, which slips from dramatic suggestion, with lush arms sending out emotional signals, to a just-the-facts-ma'am precision. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. March 7-10 at 8.)

"TIMBERLINE"

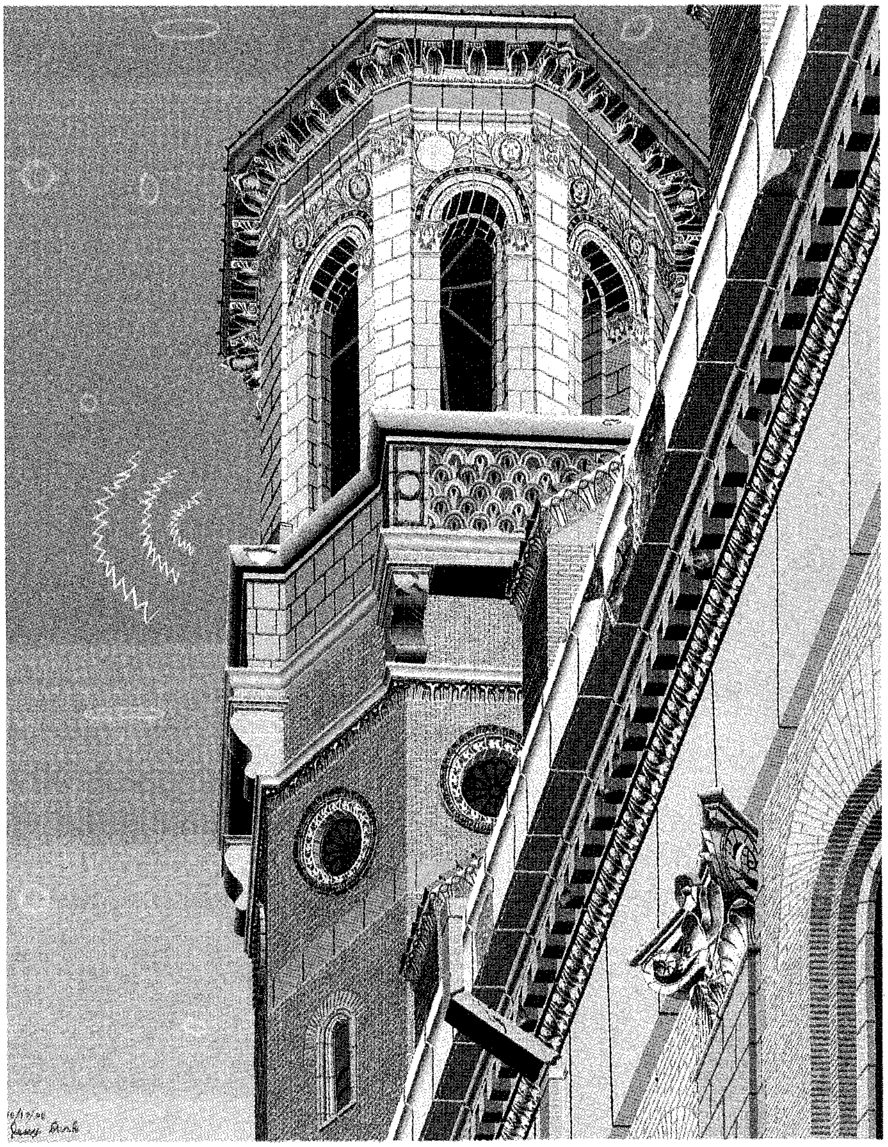
The all-female squad Lava excels at circus skills: trapeze, tumbling, hoop diving, tightrope walking. The choreographer Sarah East Johnson gives the extravaganza the dynamics of an evening-length dance. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 7-11 at 8:30. Through March 25.)

"THE DAY I LEARNED TO SWIM"

The choreographer Ben Munisteri and his six-member company offer the première of the title work, created on the cramped Pyramid Club stage. He adds two repertory works "The Rosenkavalier (Lust Is a Pig . . .)" and "Unspeakable Plastic Plastic Earth." Munisteri, who is famous for his spontaneous mid-dance monologues, has decided to let the dancing speak for itself this time. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. March 7-10 at 8 and March 11 at 3.)

"AMERICAN DELUXE"

Dean Moss's evening-length work about the implacable joy and isolation of the bully begins with Moss's younger brother explaining in voice-over what he'll do to keep on top. Meanwhile, a projection of Sergio Leone's "Fistful of Dollars" whizzes and pops on the mirrored board that the choreographer is taking for a clean, quiet dance. Later, a laughing woman and a silent woman bury a gentle and stuttery young man under a mountain of smaller boards. The various personas are intriguing, but their motives, unlike those of bullies, are hard to fathom. "American Deluxe" inaugurates dance at the Smack Mellon gallery, a former spice factory that still smells sweetly of cardamom. (56 Water St., between Main and Dock Sts., Brooklyn. 718-834-8761. March 7 at 7 and March 8-11 at 8. Through March 18.)



RAGE FOR ORDER *As an autistic child in an intellectual family, Jessy Park has grown up channelling her enthusiasms (her word), or obsessions (the medical word), into her paintings. At first, she focussed on radio dials and heaters. Recently, she has turned to exquisite depictions of houses and churches in which an uncanny accuracy of line is combined with colors of surreal brilliance (at Bodell, through March 18; see Art). As her mother, Clara Claiborne Park, notes in her new book about Jessy, "Exiting Nirvana," Jessy's discoveries of bits of order in the world—for example, that 70,003 is a prime number—give her great joy. This capacity for rapture seems to be contained in these beautiful and meticulous works, which, like Jessy, are incapable of telling lies.—Oliver Sacks*

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

PANTERA

These Texas heavy-metal purists may have changed their hair styles a few times over the last decade, but they haven't changed their minds: they're as devoted to their noisy cause as they were at the peak of their success, back in the early nineties. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. March 8-10 at 8.)

"DUETS ON THE HUDSON"

Jazz at Lincoln Center has a hit with this series of intimate recitals, which provides a privileged peek at musicians working one on one in challenging settings. **Stefon Harris,** the most exciting new vibraphonist on the scene today, meets up with **Jacky Terrasson,** a pianist who shares Harris's questing spirit. The baritone saxophonist **Hamiet Bluiett** and the pianist **D. D. Jackson** have a common trait: both heat up their instruments with spirited improvisation before they relax into the welcoming tones of gospel and blues. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6500. March 9-10 at 8.)

OUTKAST

If the rules for Grammy consideration had been written differently, it's fair to say that there wouldn't have been any controversy over Eminem—OutKast's latest album, "Stankonia" (which was released after the cutoff date, September 30), would have stolen the show. The Atlanta duo of André 3000 and Big Boi, along with their production team, Organized Noize, cranks out fast-moving lyrics and beats in the spirit of George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic empire. Toss in the political consciousness of mid-period Sly and the Family Stone and you'll start to get the picture. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. March 9 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—March 8-10: The Queen of the Blues, **Koko Taylor.** March 13: **Van Zant.** Boasting one of Southern rock's most revered surnames, the fraternal core of this band, Johnny and Donnie (who will undoubtedly be performing much of the work of their elder brother and Lynyrd Skynyrd founder, the late Ronnie), aims to take the irony out of yelling "Freebird!" at a concert's climax.

BOTTOM LINE

15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 10: **Jackie DeShannon** had some hits of her own in the sixties and opened for the Beatles during their first American tour, but she's had greater success as a songwriter, having composed smashes for the Searchers, Marianne Faithfull, and Kim Carnes. Last year she put out "You Know Me," her first album in fifteen years, and her huskily soulful delivery is still intact.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—March 9: The groovy Venezuelan dance band **Los Amigos Invisibles.** March 10-11: Now that they are old enough to legally partake at this venue's bar, the members of the appealing all-girl glam-punk band the **Donnas** are touring to promote their aptly titled third disk, "The Donnas Turn 21." With the riot-grrl heavyweights **Bratmobile** opening, fans of righteous female empowerment should have a field day.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 7-8: **Jon Spencer Blues Explosion.** This high-voltage trio is

fronted by the Lower East Side legend Spencer (formerly of squalid guitar abusers Pussy Galore), who mixes equal parts James Brown showmanship and Elvis Presley hip-shaking with a strident punk aesthetic. The group's incendiary live shows are as hilarious as they are manic. March 9-10: **Karl Denson's Tiny Universe.** After years of blowing sax for Lenny Kravitz, the onetime jazz musician Denson (he's played with former Miles Davis sidemen Jack DeJohnette and Dave Holland) has assembled a neo-hippie conglomerate. The sound is progressive yet still accessible, with an emphasis on funk. **Olu Dara,** a Mississippi-born avant-garde jazz cornettist who's also proven adept at the blues guitar, warms up the crowd with songs from his smoking new release, "Neighborhoods." March 12: **Sepultura,** Brazil's premier thrash-metal band, has striven to set itself apart from the standard Sturm und Drang of its genre by including Latin rhythms and politically aware lyrics in its music. This is not to say that the musicians don't bellow menacingly (in Portuguese) and grimace as they strike the requisite power chords.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—March 7: The forty-nine-year-old Brazilian guitarist **Vinicius Cantuária** spent the early part of his career writing songs for such superstar compatriots as Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa. For the past six years, though, he's lived in New York City, rubbing elbows with a radical set of musicians, including Bill Frisell, Arto Lindsay, David Byrne, and Laurie Anderson. As a result his bossa nova has an avant-garde edge, but it never loses its quiet power. At a recent performance at Tonic, for example, the crowd was close to tears after a single note.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 10: After years of flying just under the radar as a perpetually irritable female indie rocker, Juliana Hatfield never managed to break out of cult status. Now she's reconvened her late-eighties pop trio, **Blake Babies** (named somewhat preciously after the illustrations that accompanied William Blake's poetry), to remind fans of her once promising start.

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—March 10: Often hailed as the world's greatest bar band, **NRBQ** puts on shows that are unequal (and unbalanced) parts Thelonious Monk, Chuck Berry, and Ricky Ricardo.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 8: **Rocket from the Crypt,** a six-piece San Diego ensemble complete with sparkling horns and matching greasers-from-Hell rockabilly outfits, comes on like a glittery Vegas floor show. Despite their tongue-in-cheek sheen, they deliver a powerful punch with a bonus dose of vintage R. & B. panache. In town to promote their new album, "Group Sounds," they've picked a relatively intimate venue to stage their assault.

PETE'S CANDY STORE
709 Lorimer St., Williamsburg. (718-302-3770)—March 12: **Juliana Nash,** the former front woman for the pop-rock band Talking to Animals, takes over the minuscule back room here. Thursdays in March belong to the **Howard Fishman** quartet.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND
130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—March 7-9: **Michelle Shocked,** perhaps the best singer without a label, is just back from Dublin, where she recorded a collection entitled "Deep Natural." As she shops that around to record companies she'll be offering a companion disk, "Dub Natural," at live shows. Here she'll concentrate on the new material—all originals except for Hendrix's "House Burnin' Down"—delivered with the bluesy, gospel fervor that is her trademark, joined by Fiachna O'Braonain (of Hothouse Flowers) on guitar and longtime accompanist Rich Armstrong on bass and trumpet.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through March 10: Dave Frishberg writes funny, moving, original songs about baseball, love, and human duplicity, then sits down at the piano, which he plays like Jimmy Rowles, and sings them in a creaky, winning baritone. He hasn't been here for ten years. Don't miss him.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—March 7-8: Long before Cuba was rediscovered as the musical Promised Land, the master Latin percussionist **Carlos (Patato) Valdes** was bringing the infectious rhythms of the islands to our home town. The spirit—and palms—of this septuagenarian are still more than willing. March 9-10: The saxophonist **Joe Lovano** tips his hat to John Coltrane. Among the fine players on board for this tribute, which includes the alto saxophonist **James Spaulding** and the drummer **Idris Muhammad,** is the pianist **Steve Kuhn,** a veteran—albeit a short-lived, unrecorded one—of an early Coltrane ensemble. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through March 11: "Give the flutist some!" is not an exhortation heard at most gigs, but this double bill will be different. **Herbie Mann,** the musician who brought the wind instrument front and center in jazz, is on hand with his tropically inclined Sona Terra band. **Dave Valentin,** one of the most able of Mann's protégés, heads up a quartet.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through March 17, **Mary Cleere Haran,** who has long been the witty apotheosis of cabaret singers. ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, the pianist **Peter Mintun** is in attendance.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 11: The **David Murray** octet. One of the most pleasing aspects of Murray's playing is that, unlike the majority of saxophonists in his generation, he doesn't sound like Coltrane. Yet, if the timbre is more Sonny Rollins and the outside-the-lines effects are indebted to Albert Ayler, the soulfulness and sheer intensity of Murray's improvisations are heartfelt nods to the master himself.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through March 11: The **Elaine Elias** trio. The Brazilian-born pianist and vocalist Elias has a light-handed ease with tropical rhythms and phrasing, as well as with mainstream jazz. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 12: Whether making his trombone jump through hoops or extracting melodies from his arsenal of tuned conch shells, **Steve Turre** is a lusty improviser who's been a welcome presence on the bandstand since his days with Rahsaan Roland Kirk, in the mid-seventies.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 11: The **Russell Malone** quartet. Having paid his dues with the likes of Harry Connick, Jr., and Diana Krall, the guitarist Malone is stepping out on his own. He's a graceful stylist as well as a fluent technician; if only he'd stress the former attribute rather than the latter. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"**Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting**" is an intermittently dazzling show, drawn entirely from the vast collection that Robert H. Ellsworth donated to the museum in 1986. Though artists in this period generally had some training in Western techniques, only *guohua* (works in traditional Chinese ink media) are on view. Of the thirty-five prominent artists represented, one towers above the others: Qi Baishi (1864-1957), a former cowherd who took up painting at the age of twenty-seven. One ravishing series by Qi, more than a dozen studies of frogs, catfish, and shrimp, was executed in spongy, aqueous grays. Even better is a narrow hanging

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scroll that shows a water buffalo, seen from behind. The creature's rump makes a perfect calligraphic circle, from which his tail hangs limply, echoing the long, bare branches of a willow tree. Qi's casual, comical perfection would have made both Thurber and Corot envious. Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Correggio and Parmigianino: Master Draftsmen of the Renaissance."** Through May 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—All work and no play has never looked better than in **"Workspheres,"** a show devoted to contemporary workplace design. Ergonomically correct staplers, mouse pads, and Post-its rest in vitrines alongside ambitious projects commissioned specifically for the exhibition. The latter range from a vending machine by the Spanish artist Martí Guixé, stocked with pills purporting to help you "write everywhere" or "spread ideas," to a desk chair by Naoto Fukasawa which changes color to match your outfit. The section of the show devoted to the "Official Office" offers a snazzy cavalcade of desks (one of which is paired with a matching tricycle, for increased mobility), chairs, and lamps (including a "Do Swing" ceiling lamp, with lights attached to a trapezelike apparatus). Things are more futuristic for the worker nomad, for whom an airport lounge often serves as a conference room. In addition to the obligatory cell phone, laptop, and Palm Pilot, there's a prototype for a wearable computer in the guise of a scarf. For those in need of more privacy, the Cocoon-chair, which looks like a Noguchi lamp on wheels, allows its user to pull down a full-body hood for a little R. and R. Through April 22. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—Over the past decade, the Guggenheim's director, Thomas Krens, has turned a mild-mannered museum into an expansionist conglomerate, with branches and partner institutions in Berlin, Bilbao, Venice, and St. Petersburg. Some of the results of this transformation are on view in **"The Global Guggenheim,"** a selection of two hundred paintings and sculptures from the far-flung collection. The works themselves—a mix of familiar masterpieces and overseas guests—are generally spectacular, with particularly rich troves of Kandinsky, Brancusi, Mondrian, Picasso, and Rauschenberg. The installation is less inspiring. Like the curators of MOMA's recent "Modern Starts" experiment, Krens's team aimed to liven things up, but their glib hit-or-miss juxtapositions have a deadening effect. Do we need to be reminded that Rothko and Van Doesburg both liked orange rectangles? It's telling that the most minimally reshuffled area—the Tannhauser gallery—comes out looking the best. Through April 22. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The photographer Kenneth Josephson has turned exposure tricks and photographic illusions (boy holding photo of boy, nude holding mirror that reflects photographer) into a testament to the resources of the form. The full-scale retrospective makes a forceful case for the inventiveness of the artist, who comes across as a shutterbug version of Donald Barthelme. Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—**"Dreaming in Print: A Decade of *Visionaire*."** The editors of *Visionaire* have made a career of combining the high-spirited, ad-driven gloss of fashion magazines with the limited-edition, collector-driven craftsmanship of artist's books. They've produced editions packed in envelopes from Vuitton, folders from Hermès, and denim shirts from Levi's. The walls here are stacked with original art from their projects, and the vitrines are full of magazines, if they can be called that. No. 3 tackles erotica, in brown paper; No. 16 is a calendar that concludes with a Santa spanking scene; and No. 28 takes on the Bible, in a gilt-edged board book. Through April 21. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

583 Broadway (219-1222)—The controversial Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy may not be everybody's bowl of mayonnaise (the condiment favored in his performances), but his influence on contemporary art is undeniable—Mike Kelley, Matthew Barney, and the Chapman brothers are all indebted to him. His primal work is notorious for its gross-out factor (Vaseline, ketchup, and mayo are used to nauseating effect) and taboo subjects (incest and bestiality, to name just two). After a brief stint as a painter, he shifted to performance, and the videotapes and photographs documenting his early work are among the most discomforting works here. In the past decade, he began creating elaborate sculptural installations such as the animatronic "Garden," a cross between Duchamp's "Étant Donné" and the teen flick "American Pie." ("Garden" is on view at Deitch Projects in conjunction with this show.) Some of the work is like Castor oil—hard to stomach but good for you. Through May 13. (Open Wednesdays and Sundays, noon to 6; Thursdays through Saturdays, noon to 8.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. (873-3400)—For the past twenty years, Irwin Silver has been taking his **"Nightwalks"** photographs of New York from a tripod strapped onto a luggage cart. His very long exposures, many lasting more than half an hour, yield glowing black-and-white prints of the same old barbershops, diners, and signs that photographers have been pointing at for years, but there are also crisp images of unfamiliar architectural details, a beautiful view into the Seagram's Building, and a nighttime look down Mott Street, covered with shuttered carnival trailers. It would be easy to guess that it's the San Gennaro festival, but Silver's dates are precise, and "June 1, 1986, 5 A.M." precludes it. Where were you at 11:40 P.M. on July 24, 1987? If you entered or exited 160-162 Prince Street, next door to the Vesuvio Bakery, Silver's camera saw you, but the long exposure didn't register your presence. Through May 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The pleasures and terrors of childhood, long a subject for artists, are now in vogue with curators as well. On the heels of MOMA's excellent "Innocence and Experience" show, P.S. 1 presents "Almost Warm and Fuzzy," a less focussed version geared to young audiences. Much of the work plays with shifts in scale, as in Daniel Oates's giant pair of shoes and Charles LeDray's row of tiny hats. In a one-liner only a kid could love, a giant nose by the Art Guys sneezes a fountain of green every fifteen minutes. Elsewhere, Joseph Schneider's delightful model schooner, floating on a sea of confetti, allows viewers to raise and lower its kaleidoscopic sails. But most of the work is typically do-not-touch, like Tom Friedman's snow angel in a pile of laundry detergent on the floor. And if your child hasn't seen "Bambi" it may be hard to explain why all the performers in Maria Fernanda Cardoso's elaborate "Flea Circus" are just little specks on the floor of their cages. (They shuffled off this mortal coil a few weeks back, though a videotape documents their heyday.) Through April 8. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ROBERT OVERBY

Long before Rachel Whiteread, this West Coast artist and industrial designer (1935-93) made beautiful, ghostly casts of architectural spaces. The two here, a fire-charred door and an inside-out stairwell, both have the sombre seductiveness of his better-

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CHRISTIE'S
GREAT ESTATES

known Barclay-house castings. They were made the same year, 1971, in the artist's brother's house, in Venice, California. Though Overby preferred latex to Whiteread's plaster, his castings, like hers, retain parts of the surfaces they memorialize: paint chips and soot give them a patina of eerie factuality, as if you'd found Napoleon's whiskers still lodged in his death mask. Through March 17. (Grant Selwyn, 37 W. 57th St. 755-0434.)

Short List

JULES PASCIN
Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.
Through March 10.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SOPHIE CALLE
Calle's "Double Game" is at least a triple one at this point. Her art about the art of living caught Paul Auster's attention; Auster wrote a character, Maria, based on her into his "Leviathan" (both Sophie and Maria stripped at a Paris club, for instance); now Calle presents documentation of her recent attempts to live out the actions of her fictional alter ego. Among other things, she photographed and ate meals limited by color—orange looks particularly unappetizing. Hidden in this large collection of Calle's work is also their first collaboration—Auster's short "Gotham Handbook" manuscript, "Instructions on How to Improve Life in New York City, written for SC, Because She Asked." Calle will be present on the show's last day, taking suggestions for future projects. Through March 24. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Short List

MICHAEL BEVILACQUA
Fredericks Freiser, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.
Through March 17.
NINA BOVASSO
Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.
Through March 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

MARTIN KERSELS
In the main gallery, a mechanism rotates a life-size room like a tumbler polishing rocks. Bits of detritus shoot out into the gallery (for once, sunglasses inside would be more than a pose; they'd be protection). Nearby, a video shows topsy-turvy scenarios in a teen-age girl's bedroom. Dogs walk on walls, and girls do backbends on the ceiling, as if gravity were just a silly rumor. The video recalls Fred Astaire's famous dancing-on-walls routine in "Royal Wedding," and the sculpture suggests the tornado in "The Wizard of Oz." While it's clear that the spinning-room rig and the video set are one and the same, it's the noisy sculpture that disappoints. Through March 24. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St., 343-7300.)

JESSICA STOCKHOLDER
Rauschenberg's "combines" go to clown college, in colorful installations that merge painting and sculpture (and art and life) with a slapstick glee. Sight gags abound, like the electric fan blowing a measly strand of grass-green yarn while perched perilously close to a tub full of water (also involved are a pair of lamps, an upended couch, a fish tank, fake fur, and a metal gate). Stockholder's playful approach belies a dazzling formal rigor. Each installation is so carefully balanced that it's the visual equivalent of a high-wire act. Through March 10. (Gorney Bravin & Lee, 524 W. 26th St. 352-8372.)

Short List

JESSY PARK
Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Through March 18.
LISA RUYTER
Koenig, 359 Broadway. 334-9255.
Through March 10.

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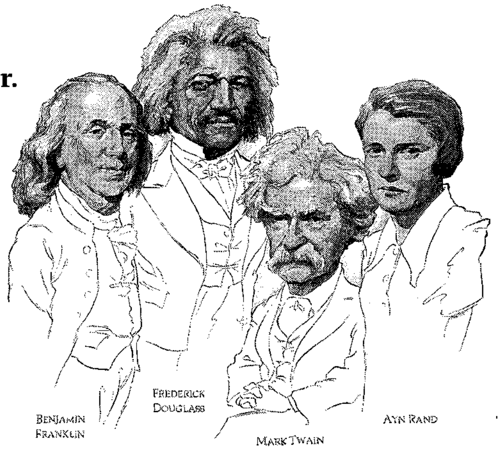

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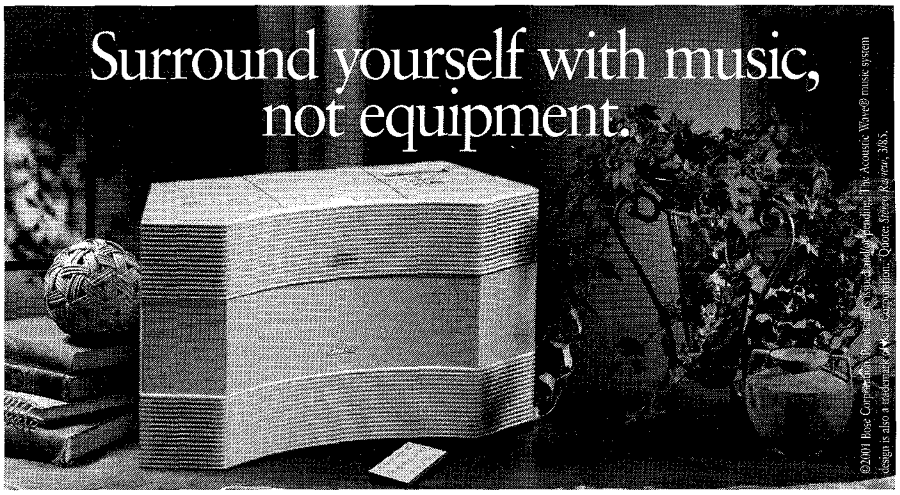

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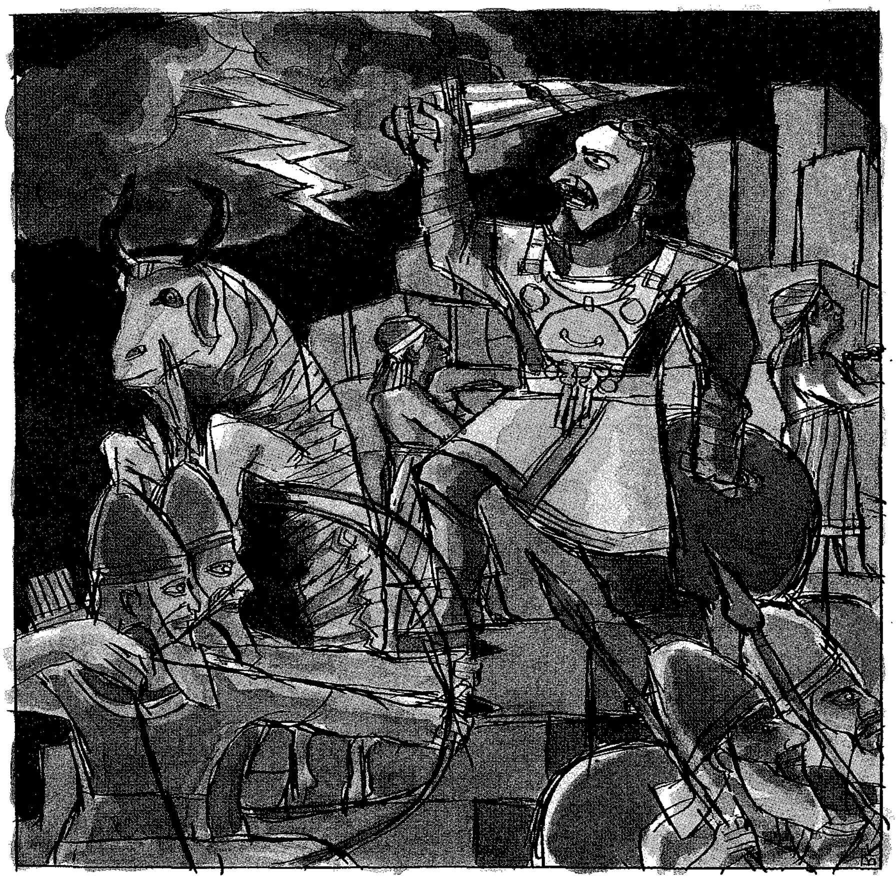
AUCTIONS & ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S EAST
March 13 at 10 A.M. and 2: "The Aesthetic Interior," late-nineteenth-century furniture and decorative arts. The show features a number of household items created or influenced by the designer Christopher Dresser, including a Worcester teapot and cover fancifully modelled as Oscar Wilde with a companion, and a silver-plated egg coddler from the London firm of Hukin & Heath. The sale opens with a selection of nineteenth-century European paintings and concludes with an offering of twentieth-century decorative objects. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)



Verdi's "Nabucco" returns to the Metropolitan Opera, beginning March 8.

BEN KATCHOR

DOYLE
March 7 at 10 A.M.: A general auction of American, English, and Continental furnishings and art works, with an added selection of Asian decorative arts. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

SWANN
March 8 at 10:30 A.M. and 2:30: A wide range of prints and drawings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including work by Bearden, Cassatt, Chagall, Klinger, Matisse, and a number of American artists of the W.P.A. era. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

"MARCH MADNESS"
March 7-11: The latest "Wendy" antiques show, with a hundred dealers offering the usual soup-to-nuts assortment of paintings, prints, clocks, furniture, silver, jewelry, and decorative accessories; Asian antiques and art works are a special feature of the sale. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. For more information, call 914-698-3442.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

"HOMMAGE"
As the story goes, the first time that C.I.A. agent turned fine-art dealer Harry Lunn saw a print of Ansel Adams's "Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico," it was upside down. Nevertheless, the picture moved Lunn to begin representing Adams and to shift his market, in the early seventies, from prints and drawings to photography, which made Lunn the founding father of the fine-art-photography market. This memorial exhibition of work from Lunn's collections shows the breadth of his enthusiasm for the medium and serves as a one-room review of its history. Prints from Adams and nineteenth-century European landscape photographers lead into Robert Frank's and William Eggleston's handheld-camera images and the contemporary work of Adam Fuss and Pierre et Gilles. Through March 10. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070.)

"STRAIGHT ARROWS"
These four young photographers—Melanie Einzig, Matt Harnett, Peter Kayafas, and Gus Powell—are updating straight street photography—no casting, no scripting, no digital adjustments, just natural light, old-fashioned cameras, and live action. New York and its citizens—maybe you're in one of these—look better than usual from the artists' distinct, often wry, perspectives. Through March 17. (Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Carrie Mae Weems's **"The Hampton Project"** (Uptown) is really two shows, a roomful of Frances Benjamin Johnston's sober photographs of students at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (a groundbreaking school for black and Native American students, which Johnston documented for the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris) and Weems's take on those images, cropped and enlarged, printed on cloth, and accompanied by a repetitive voice-over. Weems is at once appreciative of and hostile to Johnston, whose pictures she salutes as she defaces them and whose stagy politicized spirit she upholds as much as violates. The effect is bound to make viewers wish for the peace of an old-fashioned exhibit, but it works—like an advertisement you try to tune out, Weems's message gets absorbed anyway. Through April 1. ♦ **"Andy Warhol: Photography"** and **"Perfecting Mankind: Eugenics and Photography"** continue (Midtown) through March 18. (Uptown: 1130 Fifth Ave., at 93rd St. Midtown: 1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

WARD DAVENNY
Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669.
Through March 31.
WILLIAM EGGLESTON
Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727.
Through April 14.
ELIJAH GOWIN / NATHAN LERNER
Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600.
Both shows through March 17.
KENNETH JOSEPHSON
Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.
Through March 31.
RAY K. METZKER
Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.
Through March 31.
RIKA NOGUCHI
D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.
Through March 24.
HIROSHI SUGIMOTO
Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 627-1018.
Through March 24.
"MARITIME ALBUM"
PaineWebber, Sixth Ave. at 52nd St.
713-2885. Through April 1.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Whitney Museum and the New-York Historical Society.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Così Fan Tutte," with Melanie Diener, Susan Graham, Dawn Upshaw, Paul Groves, Rodney Gilfry, and Michele Pertusi; conducted by Patrick Summers. (March 7 at 8.) ♦ With Wendy Nielsen, Theodora Hanslowe, Ms. Upshaw, Gregory Turay, Christopher Schaldenbrand, and Mr. Pertusi; Mr. Summers. (March 10 at 8.) ♦ The première performances of a new production of **"Nabucco,"** Verdi's third opera and his first major hit. The hefty choral writing of this Biblical epic, which is constructed in "parts" rather than in acts, would bend it toward the world of oratorio if it weren't for the vocal fireworks of the leading roles, especially that of Abigaille, a role that has shortened the careers of a number of great sopranos. Elijah Moshinsky is the director. With Maria Guleghina (as Abigaille), Marianna Tarasova, Juan Pons, and Samuel Ramey; James Levine. (March 8 at 8 and March 12 at 7:30.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** with Miriam Gauci (as Mimi, in her début), Ainhoa Arteta, Frank Lopardo, Gerald Finley, Earle Patriarco, and Richard Bernstein; Steven Crawford. (March 9 and March 13 at 8.) ♦ **"Die Zauberflöte,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Mary Dunleavy, Michael Schade, Simon Keenlyside, John Cheek, and Kurt Moll; Sebastian Weigle. (March 10 at 1:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Mark Lamos's production of **"Tosca,"** set in Fascist Italy in the nineteen-thirties, continues its run. With Amy Johnson, Alfredo Portilla, and Jeffrey Kneebone; the conductor is Richard Buckley. (March 7 at 7:30, March 9 at 8, and March 11 at 1:30.) ♦ **"Rigoletto,"** a reprise of the new production that appeared last fall, with Christina Bouras, Kirstin Chávez, Mark Delavan, and Raul Hernandez; Guido Johannes Rumstadt. (March 8 at 7:30 and March 10 at 1:30.) ♦ The première of a new production of **"La Bohème,"** directed by James Robinson and with sets by Allen Moyer. With Maria Kanyova, Nicole Heaston, Rolando Villazon, Alfredo Daza, George Cordes, and Mel Ulrich; George Manahan. (March 10 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

"BACH CANTATAS"
Peter Sellars stages two Bach cantatas (Nos. 199 and 82) for the mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt

Lieberson; she is accompanied by the Emmanuel Music Ensemble, conducted by Craig Smith. (John Jay Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 721-6500. March 8 and March 10 at 8.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK
The opera-in-concert group, directed by Eve Queler, offers Donizetti's rarely performed (but greatly admired) opera **"La Favorita,"** sung in a new Italian translation, from the original French text. Jennifer Larmore, Gregory Kunde, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky take the leading roles. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. *March 7 at 8.*)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
In his oratorio "The Dream of Gerontius," Edward Elgar created what some consider his most original score—a highly charged and chromatic work, reminiscent of Wagner's "Parsifal," which served as a defiant spiritual challenge to the late-Victorian era of Darwin and Freud. (The text, which chronicles the last hours of a dying man, is by the Catholic apologist Cardinal Newman.) Colin Davis, the dean of English conductors, leads a rare New York performance, with Michelle DeYoung, Anthony Dean Griffey, and John Relyea as vocal soloists, backed by the Westminster Symphonic Choir. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. March 8 at 8, March 9 at 2, and March 10 at 8.)

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The big-boned orchestra of the City That Works plays three concerts at Carnegie Hall. March 8 at 8: Daniel Barenboim, the orchestra's music director, leads music by Bruckner (the Symphony No. 7) and Mozart (the "Coronation" Concerto, for which Barenboim will double as piano soloist). ♦ March 9 at 8: Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and Berlioz's "Summer Nights" (with Cecilia Bartoli). ♦ March 10 at 8: The New York première of "Aurora," by Augusta Read Thomas (with another solo turn by Barenboim), and Mahler's Symphony No. 7. (247-7800.)

FISK JUBILEE SINGERS
In the autumn of 1871, a group of singers embarked from Nashville's Fisk University—one of America's leading black colleges, as well as, incidentally, one of Al Gore's new faculty gigs—on a concert tour to try and save their school from bankruptcy. Thrown out of white hotels, their clothes worn to rags, they managed to make it to Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, in Brooklyn, where they caused such a sensation that they were soon performing up and down the East Coast, giving thousands of white Americans their first exposure to authentic black music. This week the Jubilee Singers make a historic return to Plymouth, performing some of the same spirituals that were on that original program, along with newer arrangements. (75 Hicks St., Brooklyn. 718-403-9546. March 9 at 8.)

THE MET ORCHESTRA
James Levine conducts the ensemble in Mahler's Symphony No. 9. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 11 at 3.)

RECITALS

DORA OHRENSTEIN
The soprano offers a recital of music from the fourteenth century to the present day, including two settings of "The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation" (one by Purcell, the other by Michael Gandolfi). (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. 242-4770. March 8 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
The great majority of Bargemusic's offerings are naturally devoted to instrumental music, the core of the chamber repertory. But their next concerts will be something of a departure, as the singers Wendy Hill, Phyllis Pancella, Glenn Siebert, and Kurt Ollmann, the pianists Gail Niwa and William Wolfram, and the violist Paul Neubauer present "A Celebration of the Voice," two programs of lush Romantic music. *March 8 and March 9* at 7:30: Brahms's "Liebeslieder Walzer," Op. 52, along with music by Strauss, Tchaikovsky, and others. ♦ March 10 at 7:30 and March 11 at 4: More Brahms waltzes, along with music by Donizetti, Rachmaninoff, and others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
March 8 at 8: In "Songs My Father Taught Me," the cellist Lynn Harrell pays tribute to his late father, the Met baritone Mack Harrell, in music by Bach, Schubert, Schoenberg, and others. ♦ March 13 at 8: The baritone Nathan Gunn presents the première of Gene Scheer's "Voices of World War II," a song cycle based on reminiscences of military veterans, along with music by Bolcom, Ives, and Schumann's "Leiderkreis," Op. 39. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Charles Wadsworth, the pianist and avuncular founder of the Society, comes home for two concerts in his honor emphasizing two of his favorite themes, vocal music and French repertoire. In addition to songs and woodwind pieces by Poulenc, Debussy, Chausson, and others, there will be the New York première of Kaija Saariaho's "Lonh" ("From Afar"), a delicate and mysterious work for soprano and electronic tape, sung by Lisa Saffer. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. March 9 at 8 and March 11 at 5.)

CONCERTS AT THE TEMPLE OF DENDUR
March 10 at 7: The women of Anonymous 4 make a jump into new music. Collaborating with the Chilingirian String Quartet, the group sings Britten's "Missa Brevis" and the New York première of John Tavener's "The Bridegroom"; they also offer excerpts from their disk "1000: A Mass for the End of Time," while the quartet goes it

AUTHOR-TO-WATCH
FROM MACADAM/CAGE PUBLISHING

Darryl Wimberley

Author **Darryl Wimberley** has just come out with his first work of literary fiction — to much acclaim — after finding success with two mystery books. He grew up in rural Lafayette County on the gulf coast of Florida near the Suwannee River and now lives in Austin, Texas with his wife and two children.

Previous books: *A Rock and a Hard Place, Dead Man's Bay*
Next book: *Strawman's Hammock* (Third in the *Barrett Raines* series — due out Fall 2001 from St. Martins)
Current project: *The King of Colored Town* (Literary Fiction)
Favorite authors: Ernest Hemingway, Ralph Ellison and Robertson Davies

★★★★★ Current novel: *A Tinker's Damn*

Description: Set in the swamplands and tobacco fields of 1940's Florida, rich in imagery and character, *A Tinker's Damn* is a forcefully moving novel of revenge, redemption, and the blurred distinction between the two.

Reviews:

Kirkus Review — "...solid, no-nonsense storytelling altogether too rare these days."

Washington Post Book World — "...convincing... lively... crackles with homespun wit..."

New York Times Book Review — "Darryl Wimberley is a talented writer, one who expertly describes not just the flora and fauna but also the characters who exist in this lush yet brutal landscape..."

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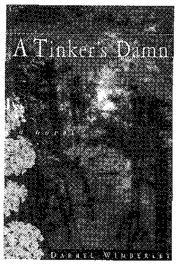

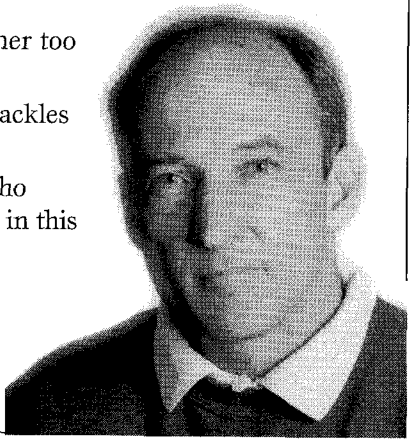

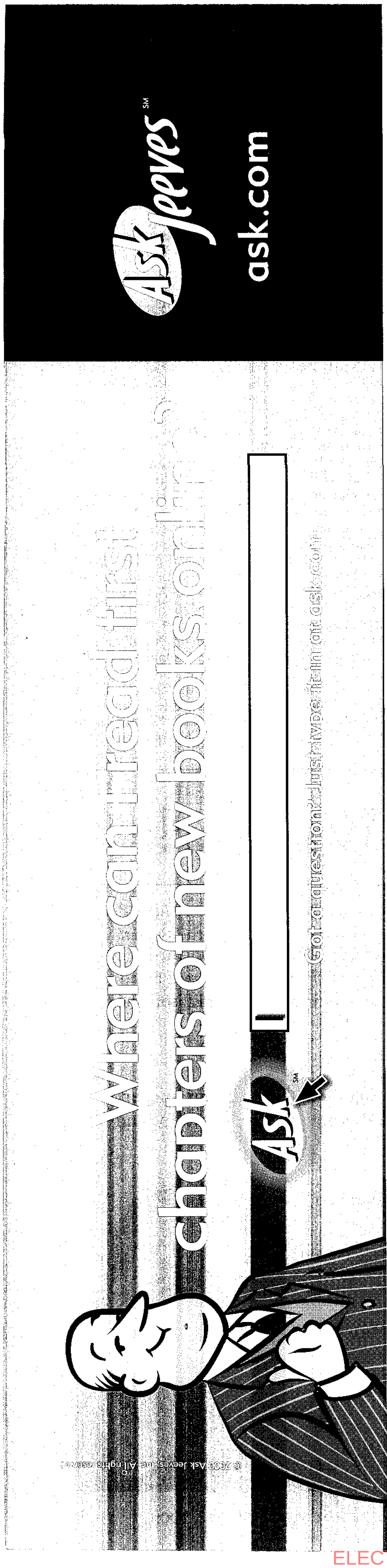
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alone in music of Haydn and Arvo Pärt. ♦ March 11 at 7: The men's chorus Chanticleer and one of their biggest fans—Frederica von Stade—sing music by Canteloube, Sondheim, and others. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

THOMAS QUASTHOFF
The luminous bass-baritone presents an all-lieder recital in the classical mode: Schubert's valedictory "Schwanengesang," Brahms's Five Songs, Op. 94, and Brahms's "Four Serious Songs," his farewell to the voice. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. March 11 at 2.)

GEORGE LONDON FOUNDATION
For the last six years the foundation has presented a program joining a well-known singer with a new winner of its George London Award; this year the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham shares a recital with the tenor Theodore Green, accompanied by the pianist Craig Rutenberg. To start off the afternoon, George Jellinek will host a conversation with the soprano Martina Arroyo. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 877-6347. March 11 at 4.)

CECILIA BARTOLI AND DANIEL BARENBOIM
The singer and the pianist perform music by Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Rossini, Bizet, and the singer-composer Pauline Viardot, one of the most influential women of nineteenth-century music. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 11 at 7:30.)

RICKY IAN GORDON: "BRIGHT EYED JOY"
Gordon's many songs are poised between the worlds of classical, pop, and musical theatre; not all listeners have been comfortable with their high-calorie content, but prominent singers have been eager to dig in. Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Kristin Chenoweth, and Brian d'Arcy James are among the artists who are presenting his work at Alice Tully Hall. (721-6500. March 13 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"INTERNATIONAL IRISH COMEDY FESTIVAL"
The great Emerald Isle stage veteran Niall Toibin, who in 1970 portrayed Brendan Behan in the Tony Award-winning production of "Borstal Boy," settles in with a one-man show this month. "First and last, it's a laugh show," the seventy-one-year-old actor says. "Each story I tell has a punch line, usually, and I draw on my acting skills to enhance the joke." His subjects are typically Irish, including "drink, religion, politics, sex, and children," according to Toibin. "A friend of mine once described me as a cross between Jackie Mason and Kitty the Hare, an Irish folk character who tells stories that frighten kids," he says. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 581-4125. March 7-24.)

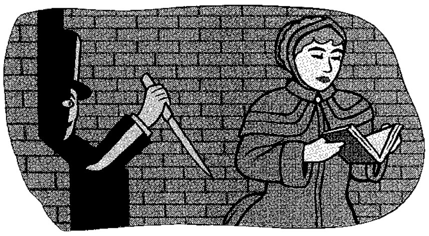
READINGS
March 9 at 7: By David Lehman, Wesley Brown, Cornelius Eady, Sharon Olds, Chuck Wachtel, and other poets and writers, from their contributions to the latest edition of the literary journal *Washington Square*. (Violet Café, 45 W. 4th St. For more information, call 992-9684.) ♦ March 11 from 2 to 5: Patti Smith, Oliver Ray, Debbie Harry, Peter Orlovsky, Ed Sanders, Maggie Estep, and other poets, musicians, and artists pay tribute to the Beat poet Gregory Corso, who died on January 17. (Angel Orensanz Foundation for the Arts, 172 Norfolk St., between Houston and Stanton Sts. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 13 at 8: By the writers Robert Sullivan, Terese Svoboda, and David L. Ulin, from their work. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.)

TALK
March 12 at 7:30: Maer Roshan, the deputy editor of *New York* magazine, moderates a discussion about the origins of creativity, with the performance artist Laurie Anderson, the novelist Michael Cunningham, the playwright Israel Horovitz, the musicians and visual artists Fischer Spooner, the photographer Todd Eberle, and the choreographer Stephen Petronio. (Angel Orensanz Foundation for the Arts, 172 Norfolk St., between Houston and Stanton Sts. For more information, call 591-1047.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Murder, Ink

In **THE ULTIMATE JACK THE RIPPER COMPANION** (Carroll & Graf), Stewart P. Evans and Keith Skinner set out to penetrate "the plethora of myth and misrepresentation" surrounding the series of London murders that seized the public imagination in 1888 and never quite let go. This compendium of unadorned primary-source material enables Ripperholics to revisit testimony on such famous details as the song ("Sweet Violets") that one victim was heard singing before her death, to read in a police report that seventy-six neighborhood butchers and slaughterers were thoroughly examined, and even to peruse a draft of a letter from Queen Victoria's private secretary relaying Her Majesty's advice—to investigate "single men occupying rooms to themselves."

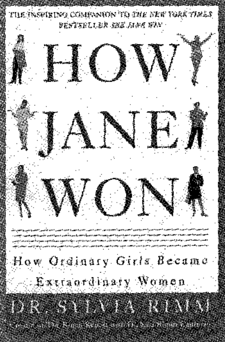


MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

A century before the Ripper terrorized the prostitutes of London's East End, another series of attacks caused the classier ladies of the West End to fear, if not for their lives, then at least for their posteriors. **THE LONDON MONSTER**, by Jan Bondeson (Pennsylvania), resurrects these forgotten outrages, in which dozens of fashionable women were approached by a man who made obscene advances before slashing their skirts and thighs or buttocks. Fear of the Monster was so extreme that some ladies were fitted with special copper armor underneath their already voluminous skirts.

The London Monster makes a brief appearance in Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's remarkable graphic novel about the Ripper, **FROM HELL** (Eddie Campbell Comics). The high drama of the plot has made it the basis for a film of the same title, which opens later this year. In a thoughtful appendix, the authors lay bare the uncertainties of the case, examine conflicting theories, and conclude that "the idea of a solution, any solution, is inane. Murder isn't like books."

—*Leo Carey*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GIRLS

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HOW JANE WON
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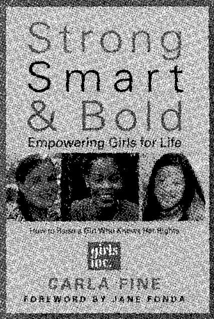
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GAME PLAN

Girl power! With proven techniques and compelling stories, *Strong, Smart, and Bold* shows how to engage a young girl's spirit and give her the self-assurance vital to succeed today.

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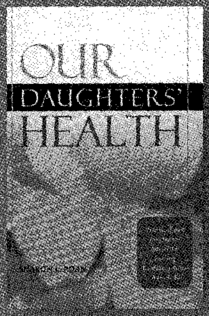
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GROWING

Addressing the unique health concerns of girls, this comprehensive guide offers clear and concise advice on everything from fitness, nutrition, and skin care to mental health issues, reproduction, and drugs and alcohol.

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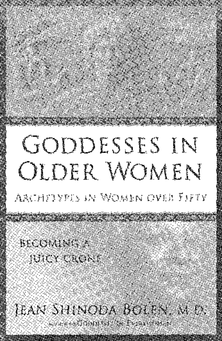
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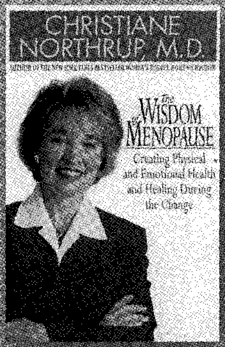
CHRISTIANE NORTHRUP M.D.
The Wisdom of Menopause
Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing During the Change

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Since her plane disappeared more than sixty years ago, people have wondered what happened to Amelia Earhart. Based on recently discovered radio messages and 25 years of research, here at last is the answer.

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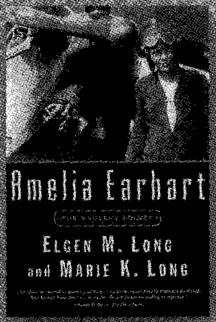
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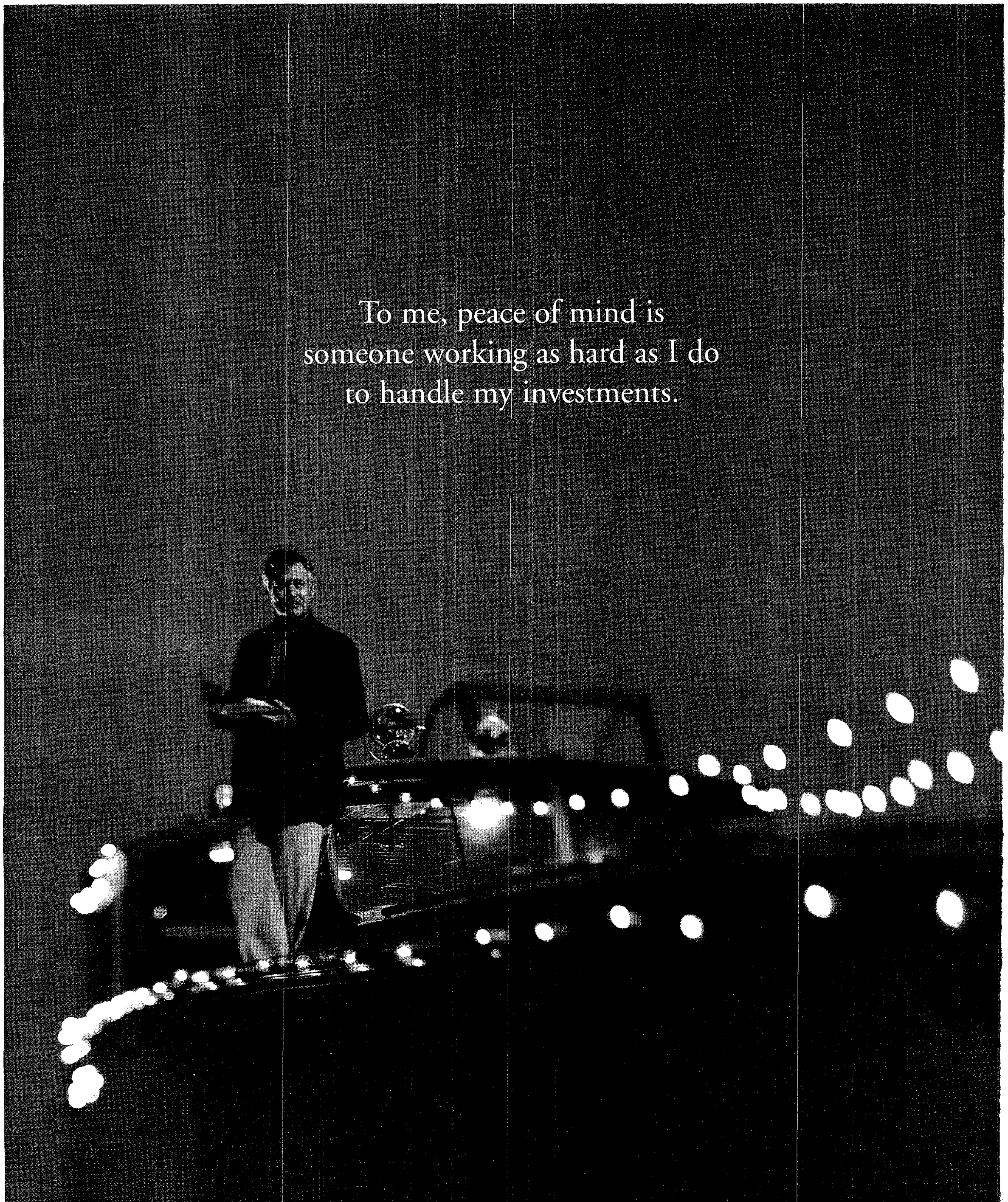
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MOVIES OPENING

BLOW DRY
A comedy about two hair-salon owners in a small English town who compete for the national hairdressing championship. With Natasha Richardson and Alan Rickman. Directed by Paddy Breathnach. Opening March 7.

COMPANY MAN
A Connecticut grammar-school teacher (Douglas McGrath) pretends to be a C.I.A. agent in this comedy co-written and co-directed by McGrath with Peter Askin. Opening March 9.

15 MINUTES
John Herzfeld wrote and directed this story set in New York City, about two celebrity-seeking killers. Robert De Niro and Edward Burns play the investigators who trail them. Opening March 9.

GET OVER IT
A teen romantic comedy with Kirsten Dunst, Melissa Sagemiller, and Ben Foster. Directed by Tommy O'Haver. Opening March 9.

THE GLEANERS AND I
Agnès Varda's documentary essay explores gleaning as both a comment on consumerism and a metaphor for filmmaking. In French. Opening March 7. (Film Forum.)

HIT AND RUNWAY
A comedy about a Greenwich Village waiter and a gay Jewish playwright who team up to write a screenplay about the fashion industry. Directed by Christopher Livingston. Opening March 9.

THE MAGNET
A drama set in the hip-hop community of Marseilles. Directed by Kamel Saleh and Ahkenaton. In French. Opening March 9. (Pioneer.)

WHEN BRENDAN MET TRUDY
Roddy Doyle scripted this comedy set in Dublin, about the unlikely romance between Brendan, an introverted movie buff, and Trudy, a thief. Directed by Kieron J. Walsh. Opening March 9. (State.)

FILM NOTES

BEFORE NIGHT FALLS
At its best, Julian Schnabel's second film is a memoir of easy and raffish good times—the endless summer days at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. Schnabel adapted an autobiographical memoir by the poet and novelist Reinaldo Arenas (Javier Bardem), a homosexual who was initially a participant in the revolution, then a victim of it, and was finally allowed to leave Cuba in 1980. Arenas settled in New York, wrote a great deal, and, suffering from AIDS, committed suicide here in 1990. Schnabel doesn't tell this story coherently: characters appear or disappear without explanation, and we don't always know where we are. The method is closer to collage than to Hollywood script construction, but Schnabel works sensually, and that makes up for a lot. Bardem, who has the face of a shy, smiling bull—a prominent nose, handsome eyes—loosens up his shoulders and elbows and gives a performance of great charm.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/8/01.) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

BOUDU SAVED FROM DROWNING
Despite the problems of sound recording in 1931, Jean Renoir went out of the studio and shot this film on the streets and along the banks of the Seine. It's not only a lovely fable about a bourgeois attempt to reform an early hippie (Michel Simon is the shaggy-bearded tramp who spills wine on the table and wipes his shoes on the bedspread) but a photographic record of an earlier France. A beautifully rhythmed film that makes one nostalgic for the period when it was made. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 12.)

CHOCOLAT
A confectionary fairy tale, photographed in pale-lemon winter light. In France, in 1960, a beautiful and charming woman (Juliette Binoche) and her little girl (Victoire Thivisol) waft into a small town, open a *chocolaterie*, and provide the unhappy and repressed inhabitants with exactly the kind of bonbons they need to make their troubles go away (the chocolate, laced with an old Mayan powder, acts as an all-purpose elixir). This inspires the hostility of the town's impotent deity, the Comte de Reynaud (Alfred Molina), who rallies the forces of reaction. Lasse Hallström's production is yet another complacent movie about the free spirits versus the squares; this one commends the audience for favoring such dangerous things as eating, dancing, friendship, sex, and riverboats. Judi Dench, as a grouchy old lady, transcends the syrup.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 16, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

"LOVE, LOVE, AMORE AND SPAGHETTI"
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LE DOULOS
Jean-Pierre Melville's 1963 combination of film noir and trick movie is also the quintessential *flics*-and-robbers flick. The characters could have stepped out of "The Asphalt Jungle" (Melville's favorite movie). They include a betrayed thief just released from prison (Serge Reggiani), the thief's possibly duplicitous friend (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a classy racketeer (Michel Piccoli), and a couple of malleable molls (Fabienne Dali and Monique Hennessy). The writer-director strips his toughs and tarts down to basics: you grasp their natures only in action, partly because most of their dialogue is filled with half-truths, doubletalk, and triple crosses. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Cinema Classics; March 12-13.)

HANNIBAL
Ten years after "The Silence of the Lambs," Hannibal Lecter returns to the table. He is played, once again, by Anthony Hopkins, who seems both more placid—as you would expect, for the doctor has been enjoying his freedom—and more particular in his cravings. Lecter is in Florence, where he is suspected by a local detective (Giancarlo Giannini, the best and most rumpled thing in the movie). Also on the trail is Clarice Starling (Julianne Moore), who is now an outcast within the F.B.I. Huntress and prey finally meet; indeed, we are given to understand that they can barely keep away from each other. What spoils the harmony is the vengeful presence of Mason Verger (Gary Oldman), one of Lecter's less decorous victims. The screenwriters, David Mamet and Steven Zaillian, do a good job of sifting the dross from Thomas Harris's novel, and the director, Ridley Scott, gets elegant value from what remains. The locations are lush, the reworked ending could not be neater, and the special effects were apparently devised by an abattoir. There's just one problem, and it's insurmountable: this is not a scary movie.—*Anthony Lane* (2/12/01) (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
The latest film from the talented young Hong Kong writer-director Wong Kar Wai makes us pant for adultery. In the early sixties, in a community of Shanghai refugees living in Hong Kong, Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Mr. Chow (Tony Leung) are next-door neighbors in a friendly apartment building. The perfectly dressed and coiffed couple meet, talk, and realize that their frequently travelling spouses are off having an affair with each other. What to do? The movie is all about sensual anticipation. Nat King Cole croons on the soundtrack, and the camera caresses the rain on the streets and the texture of a stone wall in the semi-darkness. So skillfully does the director bring us to a state of breathless expectation that when he refuses to deliver the goods he almost seems to have invented a new form of perversion. In Cantonese and French.—*D.D.* (2/5/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Murray Hill Cinemas.)

THE MEXICAN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

POLLOCK
A dogged march through the life and work of Jackson Pollock, starting in the early nineteen-forties, when Lee Krasner (Marcia Gay Harden) first approached him in Greenwich Village, continuing through their marriage and other tempests, and ending gloomily in a car wreck in 1956. The film was directed by Ed Harris, who also plays the artist. His face doesn't much resemble that of Pollock, who looked more like the Wallace Shawn of the West, but Harris has mastered the hunched amble and the glaring gaze. His best scenes are not the boozy rants but the quiet times with a cigarette and a brush—or, latterly, a dripping stick. Pollock's drinking was an interruption of his art, not a spur to it, and the film can do little to connect the two; we are left with a sombre study of discontent, enlivened by the appearance of Jennifer Connelly as the painter's final girlfriend. What she saw in him, by that stage, is anybody's guess. With Val Kilmer pretending to be Willem de Kooning.—*A.L.* (3/5/01) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SNATCH
Guy Ritchie caused a stir—mistaken by some for a storm—with his first feature, "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels." Not wishing to tamper with a winning formula, he has returned to the scene of the crime, delivering a further batch of never quite credible Cockneys. They have names like Bullet Tooth Tony (Vinnie Jones) and Brick Top (Alan Ford), and they converse in the artful patois that Ritchie continues to sell as echt. The plot, this time, is more convoluted, involving a diamond theft and a series of boxing matches, none of which, naturally, go according to plan. Ritchie's strength is the running gag; one can only grow fond of a dog that has swallowed a rubber toy and thus squeaks when it tries to bark. His weakness is a hectic, self-advertising style that wearies what it's meant to quicken; you come out feeling sated and soiled.—*A.L.* (1/29/01) (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Waverly.)

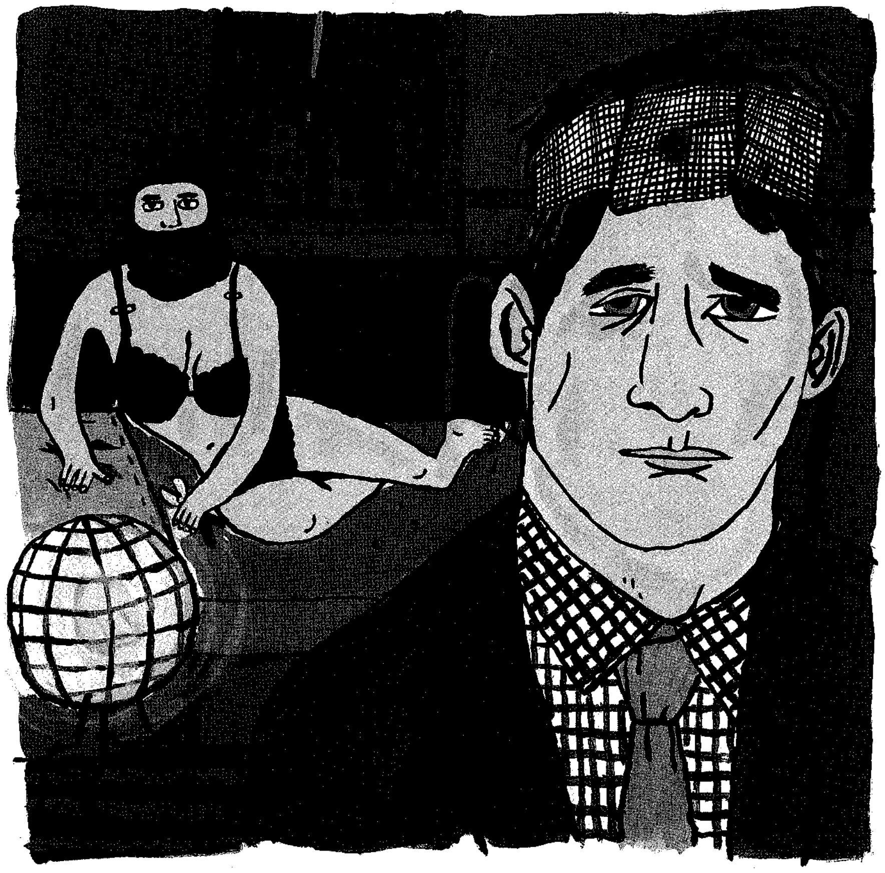
THE TASTE OF OTHERS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

TO SLEEP WITH ANGER
In Charles Burnett's 1990 succès d'estime, Paul Butler is quietly heroic as Gideon, a man of the South transplanted to Los Angeles who, with his wife, Suzie (Mary Alice), has raised two sons (Carl Lumbly and Richard Brooks) according to the standards of hard work and old-time religion. Danny Glover gives his best performance—both ticklish and upsetting—as Harry Mention, an old acquaintance from down home who finagles his way into Gideon's family and exposes its fault lines. With his beguiling chivalry, Harry inspires Gideon and Suzie's nostalgia for the surefooted courtliness that has all but disappeared from their fragmented, contemporary lives, then proceeds to unleash forces of discord that bring family antagonisms to a flash point. This eccentric comedy-drama is a truly folkloric film. Burnett and his cast tap depths of mystery, soulfulness, and glee.—*M.S.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 9.)

TRAFFIC
Tremendous stuff from the first shot to the last. Steven Soderbergh's vivid and wide-spanning view of

the "war on drugs" presents three parallel stories, each with its own look and style: the furtive and ambiguous work of two Mexican state troopers (Benicio Del Toro and Jacob Vargas); the frantic investigations of the new American drug czar (Michael Douglas), who discovers that his beautiful, intelligent sixteen-year-old daughter (Erika Christensen) is freebasing cocaine; and the luxurious life of a San Diego woman (Catherine Zeta-Jones) who tries to hold on to her fortune when her drug-kingpin husband (Steven Bauer) is arrested and made to stand trial. The first story is photographed in tobacco-stain brown, the second with blue filters, the third in bright sunshine—all by Soderbergh himself, who puts the camera on his shoulder and throws us into the middle of the action. Individually, the scenes play with superb toughness, and the over-all impression is one of high intelligence and great good humor threading its way through a morass.—*D.D.* (12/25/00 & 1/1/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

YI YI (A ONE AND TWO)
Marvellous. It begins with a wedding and ends with a funeral, and, in a style that could only be called radiantly matter-of-fact, Edward Yang's movie encompasses the life of a large Taiwanese family and such central elements of middle-class existence as business ethics and the disillusionment of reaching the age of forty-five. The characters, including an engineer at a troubled computer-hardware firm, live in an Americanized work environment, yet certain emotions nearly lost to Americans, such as modesty and shame, still rule their lives. Yang works very deliberately; you have to slow yourself down to get into the pace of the movie, but once you do every shot seems momentous. He doesn't carve up the space, he frames it, and he excels at portraiture. A character stands alone, in a doorway, or at a window, and Yang is so attentive that he gets the revelation that he wants, tenderly, quietly, before moving on. With Wu Nienjen as the executive father and Jonathan Chang as his indomitably curious little boy. In English, Hokkien, and Mandarin.—*D.D.* (1/8/01) (Cinema Village.)


Flora Montgomery and Peter McDonald in the Irish comedy "When Brendan Met Trudy."

MARK TODD

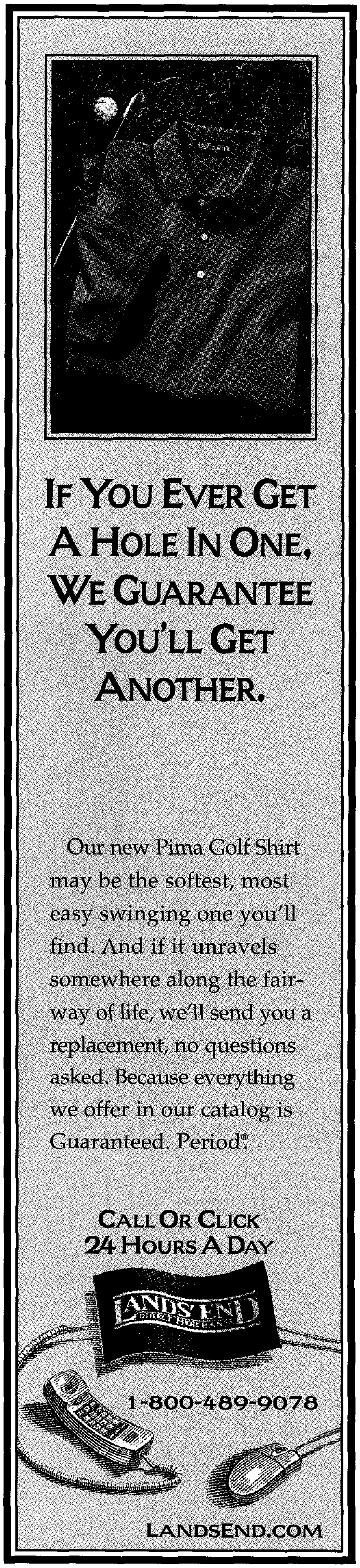
ALSO PLAYING

THE CAVEMAN'S VALENTINE
42nd Street E Walk, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.
CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON
(12/11/00)
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 64th and 2nd.
THE HOUSE OF MIRTH (12/25/00 & 1/1/01)
Eastside Playhouse and Quad Cinema.
MONKEYBONE
Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.
O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?
(12/25/00 & 1/1/01)
Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Sutton 1 and 2, and Union Square.
SERIES 7
Angelika Film Center.
THE WIDOW OF SAINT-PIERRE
Paris.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.



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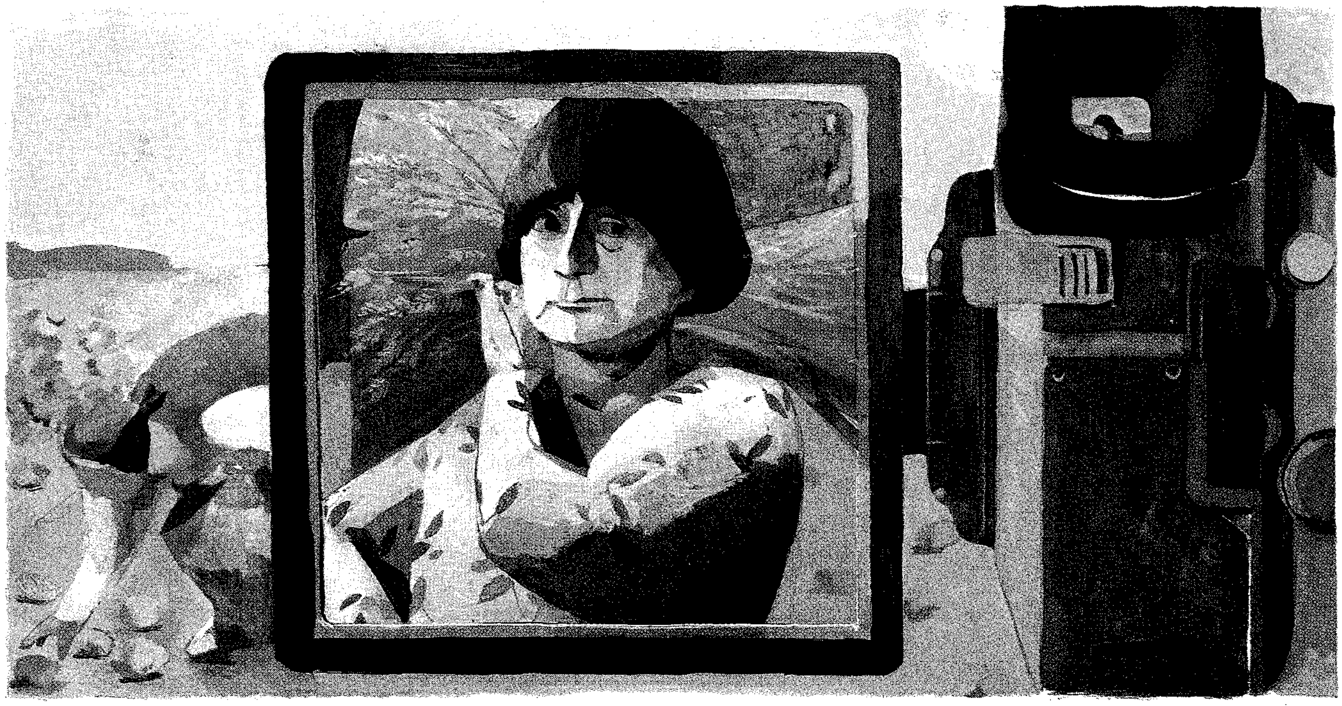
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



LA GLANEUSE *Agnès Varda's latest film, "The Gleaners and I," which opens March 7, explores the traditional peasant practice of gathering grain after a harvest. With her characteristic warmth and shrewdness, the French filmmaker celebrates France's ancient devotion to the land at the same time that she revels in the technology of her digital camera. Starting on March 16, Film Forum will show twenty-eight of Varda's features and documentaries. Her subjects range from hedonistic sixties Hollywood in "Lions Love (. . . and Lies)" to polemical feminism in "One Sings, the Other Doesn't," and her distinctive mixture of lyricism and tough-mindedness takes wing in her portraits of women—most potently in the 1985 film "Vagabond," with Sandrine Bonnaire as a teen-age runaway.*

RICCARDO VECCHIO

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through April 1: "The Films of William Randolph Hearst." March 10 at 2: "Enchantment" (1921, Robert Vignola; silent). ♦ March 10 at 4: "Beauty's Worth" (1921, Vignola; silent). ♦ March 11 at 2: Selected episodes from Hearst's serial films. ♦ March 11 at 4:30: "Getting Mary Married" (1919, Allan Dwan; silent).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—March 7-13: The New York Underground Film Festival. For a complete schedule, visit www.nyuff.com.

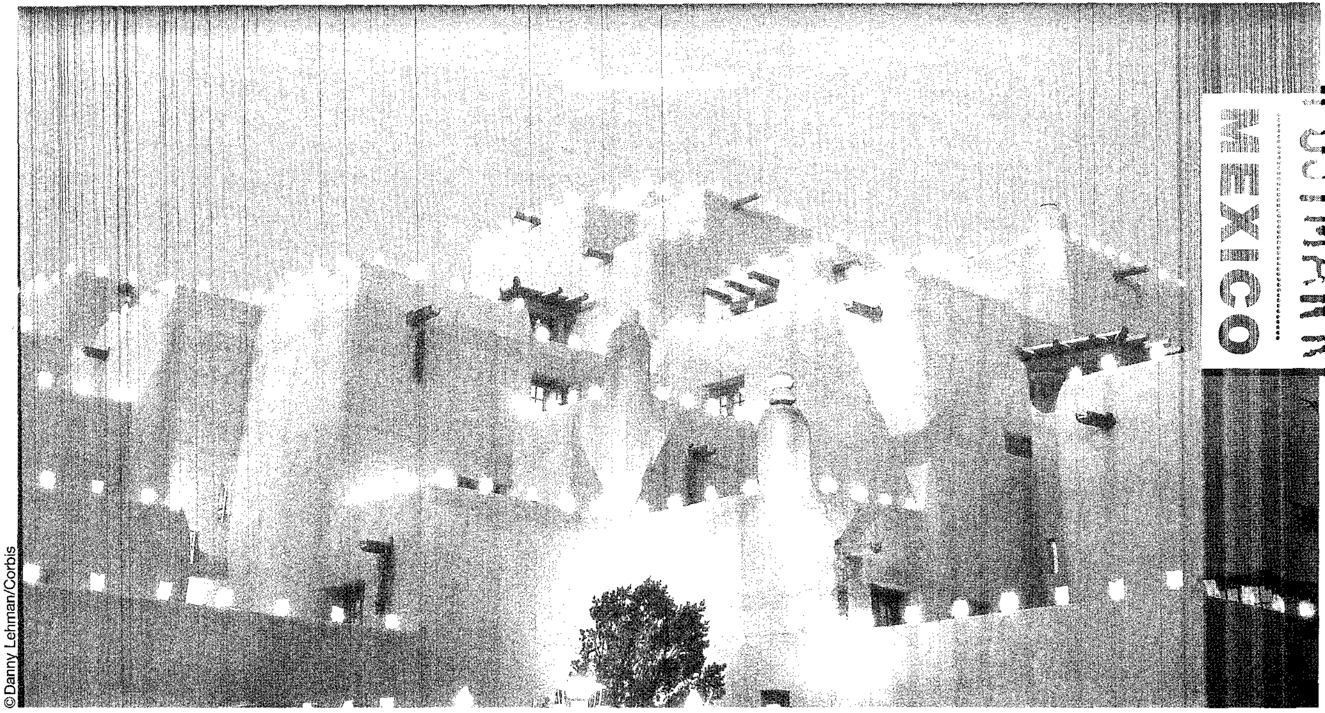
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (777-3456)—March 8 at 6:50: "The Hidden Soul of Harmony" (1990, Nigel Wattis). ♦ March 8 at 8:50: "The Hard Nut" (1992, Matthew Diamond). ♦ March 9 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "To Sleep with Anger" (†). ♦ March 10 at 2 and 8: "The Blackout" (1997, Abel Ferrara). ♦ March 10 at 4:30: "Heart Beat" (1980, John Byrum). ♦ March 11 at 2 and 6:50: "Out of It" (1968, Paul Williams). ♦ March 11 at 4 and 9:10: "Two Girls and a Guy" (1997, James Toback). ♦ March 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Boudu Saved from Drowning" (†). ♦ March 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Man in the White Suit" (1951, Alexander Mackendrick).

CINEMA CLASSICS
332 E. 11th St. (971-1015)—Through March 30: A celebration of the French New Wave. March 7-8 at 8 and 9:50: "Eyes Without a Face" (1959, Georges Franju). ♦ March 9 at 7:40 and 9:50 and March 10-11 at 5:45, 7:55, and 10:05: "The Soft Skin" (1964, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ March 12-13 at 8 and 10: "Le Doulos" (†).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through March 15, an Eric Rohmer retrospective. All films are in French. March 7 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Full Moon in Paris" (1984). ♦ March 8 at 1:50, 5:45, and 9:45: "A Tale of Springtime" (1989). ♦ March 8 at 3:55 and 7:55: "Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle" (1987). ♦ March 9-11 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Chloe in the Afternoon" (1971). ♦ March 13 at 1, 5:20, and 9:40: "A Tale of Winter" (1992). ♦ March 13 at 3:10 and 7:30: "Autumn Tale" (1998).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION & RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through April 29: Screenings of "Traffik," the British miniseries that inspired Steven Soderbergh's "Traffic." March 8 at 6 and March 10 at 2: Episodes One and Two. ♦ March 9 at 6 and March 11 at 2: Episodes Three, Four, and Five. ♦ Through May 13: "Nick Park's World: The Eccentric Adventures of Wallace and Gromit." March 7-11 at 1 and March 8-9 at 6.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through March 8: "The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema in Transformation." All films are in Mandarin. March 7 at 1, 5, and 9: "Mr. Zhao" (1998, Lu Yue). ♦ March 7 at 3 and 7: "Go for Broke" (2000, Wang Guangli). ♦ March 8 at 1 and 7: "Platform"(2000, Jia Zhang Ke). ♦ March 8 at 4:45: "On the Beat" (1995, Ning Ying). ♦ March 9-18: "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 9 at 1 and 6:15 and March 11 at 9: "Murderous Maids" (2000, Jean-Pierre Denis). ♦ March 9 at 3:30 and 8:45 and March 10 at 1:30: "According to Matthieu" (2000, Xavier Beauvois). ♦ March 10 at 3:45, March 11 at 1:15, and March 13 at 6:15: "Samia" (2000, Philippe Faucon). ♦ March 10 at 5:45 and March 11 at 3:15: "A Crime in Paradise" (2000, Jean Becker). ♦ March 10 at 8:30 and March 11 at 5:30: "Esther Kahn" (2000, Arnaud Desplechin). ♦ March 13 at 1: "The Town Is Quiet" (2000, Robert Guédiguian). ♦ March 13 at 3:45 and 8:30: "Saint-Cyr" (2000, Patricia Mazuy).



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POSTMARK
MEXICO

piquant traditions

by jan jarboe russell

Thirty-one years ago, as a high school student from small-town Texas, I made my first trip to Mexico City. One Easter Sunday, in search of breakfast, I wandered into a crowded food hall near the center of the city. Finding a seat on an aquamarine wooden bench, I waited patiently for an old woman with obsidian eyes to serve me.

Eventually she brought me a white cereal bowl filled with hot chocolate that was topped with frothy whipped cream flavored with toasted almonds, cinnamon, and real Mexican vanilla. The smell of the chocolate was so sweet it was intoxicating. The woman returned with something called *pan de yema,* a perfectly rounded piece of egg-bread the color of gold.

"Buen Provecho," said the woman, which means "eat well" in Spanish. Dipping the bun into the chocolate, I ate in silence, thinking that I would never forget the warmth of her hospitality. When the bill arrived, it was the equivalent of a mere twenty cents.

Even now, after many return visits, that particular breakfast defines for me the experience of holiday feasting in Mexico. The food stalls just off public squares are at the cultural vortex of Mexican society, as are the peasant women who can prepare elaborate feasts on tiny hot plates. The triumph of Mexico is in its eating rituals. So much solace and meaning is attached to the dishes that coincide with the change of the seasons and religious holidays.

The simplest cuisine is generally the most difficult to prepare well, because the choice of ingredients cannot be compromised. Take *atole,* one of the traditional Easter dishes. In some Mexico City restaurants, this hot drink is often carelessly prepared with leathery corn, which tastes pasty and bland, not much better than soupy Cream of Wheat. However, if eaten in Oaxaca, where all manner of corn is grown, *atole* tastes like ambrosia from the Aztec gods. The *masa* is made from multicolored corn, and the *atole* is consequently colorful and filled with flavor. They do not cook the corn, but grind and then strain it, so the taste remains rich. On the coast, near Veracruz, a rare *atole* is made with bitter orange juice.

Another traditional food during Holy Week is *charales,* normally made with scaly white fish. Diana Kennedy, a well-known Mexican cookbook author, says her favorite version is made with dried shrimp fritters, flavored with an acidic green leaf that resembles rosemary, thereby earning it the name of *romeritos*. My favorite Easter dessert is *capirotada*, a Mexican version of bread pudding that is made with tortillas layered with cheese, raisins, and coconut. The whole concoction is then smothered in syrup.

December 16th marks the beginning of the Christmas holiday in Mexico. Groups of friends go from neighborhood to neighborhood, reënacting the journey that Mary and Joseph made from Nazareth to Bethlehem prior to the birth of Jesus. A few years ago, I went to Oaxaca during the holidays to take some cooking lessons from María Concepción Portillo de Carballido. Maria's house, which doubles as a bed and breakfast, was full of guests. She cooked for all of them on a small, six-burner stove in a kitchen that was no bigger than a walk-in closet.

"Food is life. Food is fun," Maria told me repeatedly in Spanish, as she showed me how to make suppers of *pozole*, a pork and hominy stew; seven different varieties of mole, a sauce made of chocolate; and tamales (a big staple at Christmastime). What impressed me most was how rapidly Maria worked, and how very much she laughed as she worked. Once she took a leafy stem of epazote, a bitter herb, and quickly dipped it in three cups of hominy water to add extra flavor to the stew. "With epazote, you only want to kiss the water," advised Maria, giggling. "Don't make love to it."

Much effort goes into the preparation of what Mexicans call Noche Buena, the traditional meal that is eaten on Christmas Eve. Some families prepare a turkey, but it's nothing like our traditional turkey dinner. In Oaxaca, all of the turkey's bones are removed, and it is stuffed with nuts, raisins, fruits, and assorted peppers.

After Christmas, on January 6th, mothers make *rosca de reyes*, a cake that is baked in a ring. A small plastic doll, a symbol of the infant Jesus, is baked inside. These cakes remind me of the King cakes in New Orleans made for Mardi Gras festivities.

Of all the holidays in Mexico, my favorite is Día de los Muertos or Day of the Dead celebrated from October 31st to November 2nd. Mexicans believe that, during this time, the spirits of loved ones come back to visit their earthly homes. As Día de los Muertos approaches, women go to crowded and festive markets to buy marigolds, hand-dipped candles, and special foods to place in home altars they have created for their lost loved ones. They also make sugar skulls, homemade tamales, fresh *pan de yema*, and corn tortillas to place in the altars. The mood of the holiday is not somber or sad but rather joyful, as though the arrival of their loved ones is imminent. There's a saying in Oaxaca: "We are not here for a long time, we are here for a good time."

Author Kennedy lives on a small ranchero west of Mexico City, where she grows much of her own food. She often has friends over for Día de los Muertos, and prepares a meal in which everything is black: There are black beans, dishes made with black mole or chocolate sauce, and even small black cakes she calls *sopes* for dessert.

Kennedy has a private ritual of her own on this day. She always makes a special batch of tamales for her freezer. "I tell my friends that when I'm gone and they go to prepare an altar for me, I want them to use the tamales from my freezer. After all," she says, "in my afterlife, I want to eat well."

(Jan Jarboe Russell is a columnist for the *San Antonio Express-News* and a contributing editor to *Texas Monthly* magazine.)

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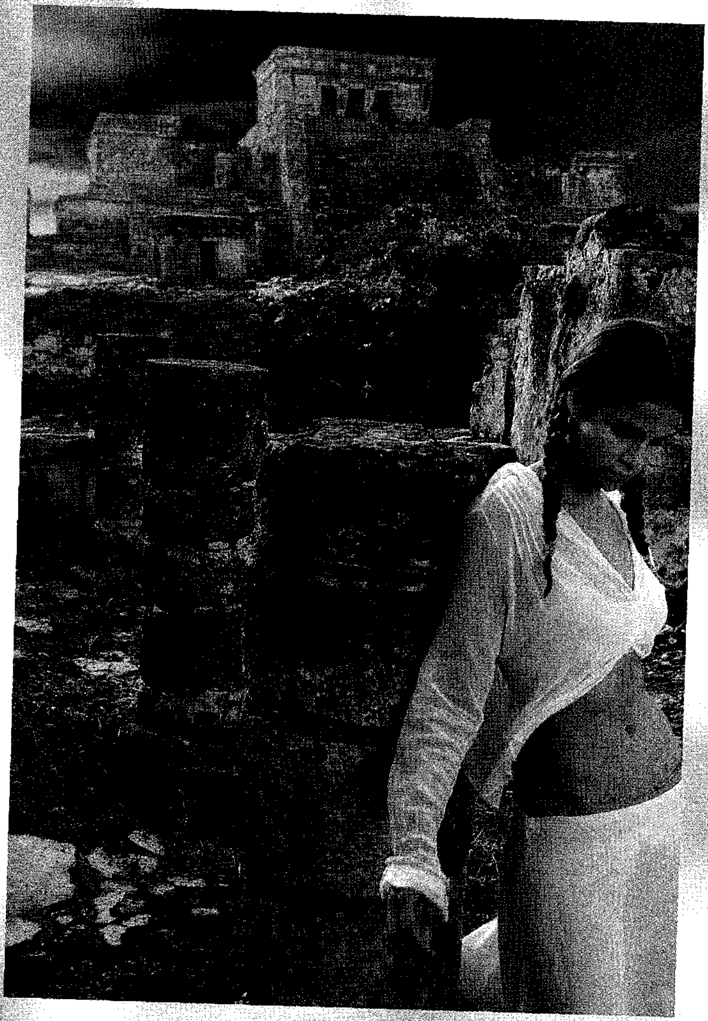
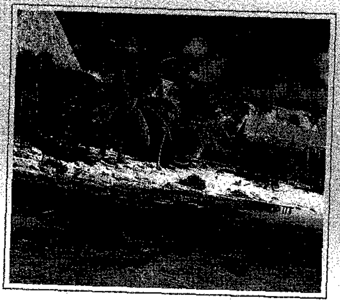
I was born thousands of years ago, and soon I taught the world to count the days by the sun, the months by the moon, and the years by the stars. **Today I am affectionately called México, and I am full of intrigue and wonder.**





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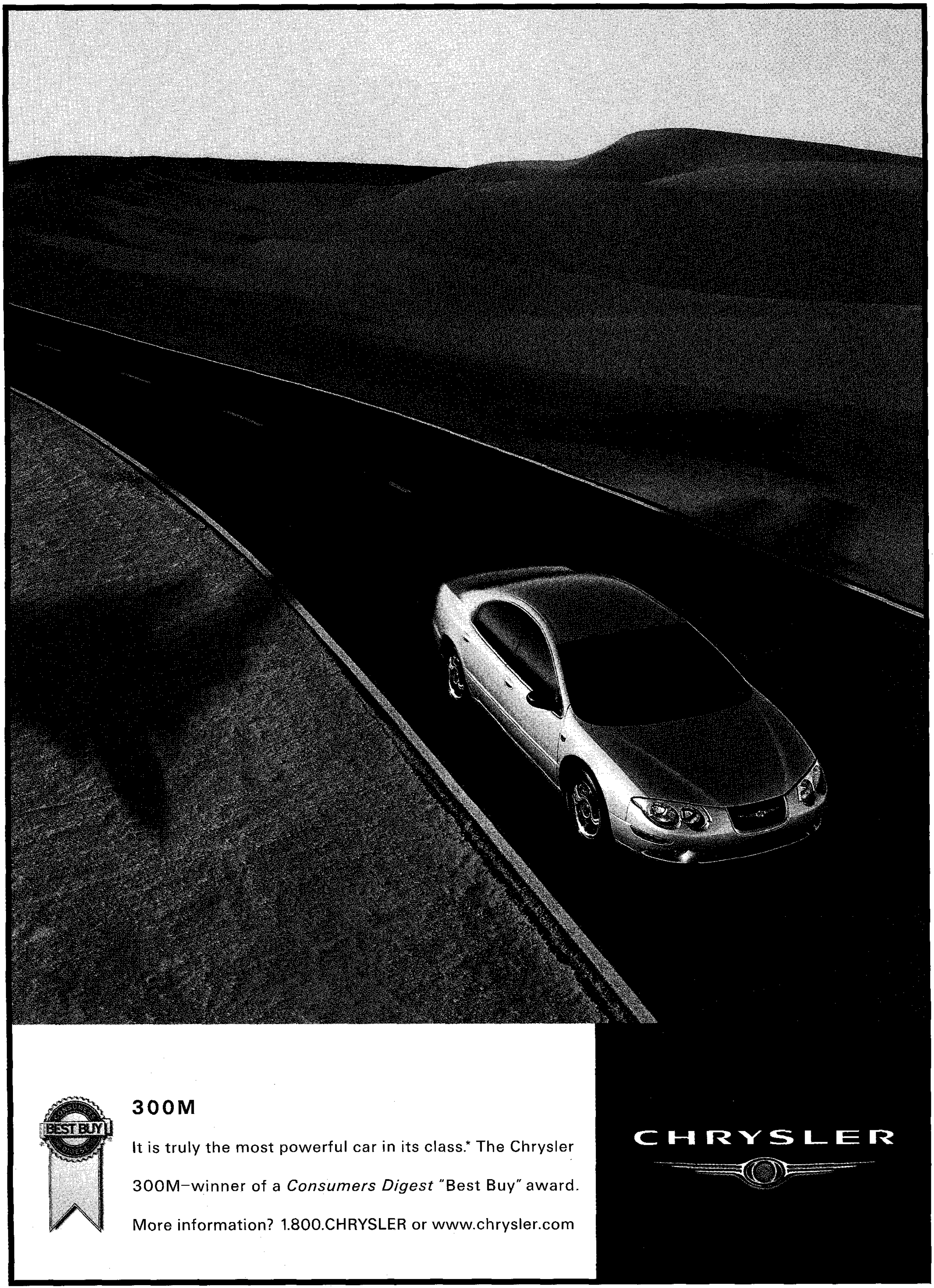
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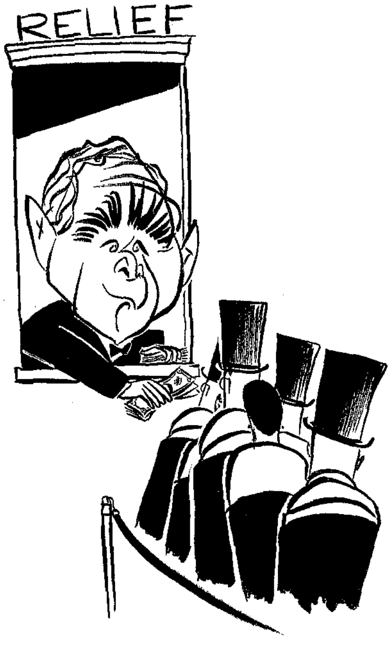
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
GENEROUS GEORGE

George W. Bush's budget address to a joint session of Congress last week was, as now seems routine for big Bush set pieces, remarkably deft—coherently organized, competently written, and ingeniously crafted to soothe delicate sensibilities. If its literary aesthetics were Gersonian (with the Convention speech, the Inaugural, and now this, Michael Gerson, Bush's chief speechwriter, is three for three), its political aesthetics were Clintonian. "Year after year in Washington," began its most elegant triangulating passage, "budget debates seem to come down to an old, tired argument: on one side, those who want more government, regardless of the cost; on the other, those who want less government, regardless of the need." Bill Clinton couldn't have put it better himself, and he never did (his "the era of big government is over" was crude by comparison).

Clinton used the Republican lexicon of toughness and personal responsibility to camouflage a program whose overall thrust was egalitarian and redistributive. Bush uses the Democratic lexicon of social concern in a way that is symmetrical but not morally equivalent. One can argue that for a Republican President to speak warmly of public spending for education, the environment, and health care signals a moral advance of sorts, even if the driving force is political calculation. One can argue that lip service is better than no service. But these lips are thin and pursed. Trumpeting "a new prescription-drug benefit for low-income seniors," Bush declared, "No senior in America should have to choose between buying food and buying prescriptions." That applause line brought even Edward Kennedy lumbering to his feet. Understandably, the President omitted the details—for example, this one: under the benefit he has proposed, a widow living on as little as fifteen thousand dollars a year would get no help until she had already spent six thousand dollars on prescription drugs. That is, she would have to have already left more than a third of her meagre income at the pharmacy. To put it still another way, her "deductible" would be a hundred and fifteen dollars—per week, not per year.



When you strip away the homilies that everybody agrees on (or has agreed to agree on)—education good, racial profiling bad, environment good—you are left with the tax plan. And when you strip away those aspects of the tax plan that everybody agrees on (or has agreed to agree on)—a bigger child credit, a lesser "marriage penalty," a modest break for "working families," some provision for keeping family farms intact—you are left with an incomprehensibly huge gift to the well-off. The Administration has dismissed, but has not been able to refute, independent analyses showing that forty per cent of the benefits of the Bush tax cut will accrue to the richest one per cent of taxpayers; that the bottom eighty per cent will get less than a third of the benefits and the bottom twenty per cent less than one per cent; that *all* the benefits of the proposed abolition of the estate tax will go to the heirs of the richest two per cent; and that the richest six per cent of that two per cent will rake in half the estate-tax pot. The shape of the Bush tax program represents a seismic shift in the overall tax burden toward the bottom of the economic scale. And its size represents a massive diversion of actual and poten-

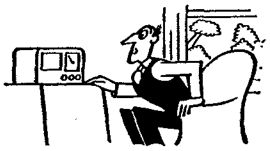
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

tial resources away from public activities that benefit the whole of society—activities like education, public health, and environmental protection, the very ones Bush endorsed at the outset of his speech—and toward the single purpose of augmenting the net incomes of the comfortable. That goal, by the way, is superfluous. From 1992, the year before a supposedly onerous new marginal tax rate kicked in, through 1998, the most recent year for which Internal Revenue figures are available, the average *after-tax* income of the richest one per cent rose from about four hundred thousand dollars to just under six hundred thousand, and from 12.2 per cent of the national net income to 15.7 per cent. (Disparities of wealth, as opposed to income, are, of course, much higher.) Really, now—how urgently do these good people require a new subsidy from the other ninety-nine per cent?

All this was thoroughly aired before the election and its aftermath, which hovered invisibly over the House chamber last week. The question is not one of Bush's legitimacy. The new President—so the highest authorities assure us—holds office by virtue of a process that was legal and constitutional. But not even the Supreme Court could decree that the electorate endorsed his policies, the most conspicuous of which was the tax program he presented the other night. More people voted for Vice-President Gore than for Governor Bush, and they didn't do so because Gore had the more pleasing personality. If you factor in the millions who opted for outriders—Ralph Nader to Gore's left; Patrick Buchanan, Harry Browne, and Howard Phillips to Bush's right—then the electorate's expressed preference for a budgetary and tax regime more liberal than Bush's goes from a mere plurality of half a million to an outright majority of two and a half million. Our ramshackle eighteenth-century institutional and constitutional arrangements enabled Bush to become President despite being defeated in the vote of the people. Those arrangements, fortuitously, also give the Democratic half of the Senate the power to obstruct a tax proposal which, in its disputed parts, comes down to greed. The use of that power would be another symmetry, and not a fearful one.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

ON THE AIR
WHEN A HIT MAN CALLS



A few hundred thousand people were listening when Luis Jiménez took the call. It was rush hour on a Wednesday morning, and Hispanics around the city—caught in traffic or settling into their jobs—were tuned to La Mega 97.9 FM, the biggest Spanish-language radio station in New York.

Jiménez's show is known to fans as El Vacilón de la Mañana, or "the morning party." (*El vacilón* can also mean "the joker.") He fills his four-hour weekday broadcasts with earthy bilingual puns and bedroom high jinks that often require barnyard sound effects. A few weeks ago, he challenged his listeners to phone in and reveal something they had never told their spouses. Anonymous calls trickled in. One man admitted to cheating on his wife; another said that he was a bigamist. A woman confessed that she hadn't been a virgin when she got married.

At 8:12 A.M., Jiménez rolled over to the next caller, a man who identified himself as Frank. They exchanged pleasantries, and then Frank cut to the point: "This is to say what I've never told my wife. When I was down in Puerto Rico, I used to kill people for money."

Jiménez whistled, and there was a moment of dead air. "You killed people?" he asked in Spanish. And then, in English, "You were a hit man?"

"*Sí*," Frank said.

The confession went on for three minutes and twenty seconds, a lifetime on live radio. The murders took place "in the *casería*," Frank said, using Puerto Rican slang for a housing project, and they were the result of rivalries among singers. "Singers?" Jiménez asked, incredulous. "Singers who wanted to kill other singers?" Yes, Frank said. *Raperos* (that is, rappers) from the island's underground music scene, motivated by "grudges and envy," had hired Frank to gun down their rivals. When Jiménez requested names, Frank charmingly asked for permission—"Can I say?"—and then named a gangster-reggae star popular in Puerto Rico.

For the first time in his career, Jiménez was speechless. After a moment, he asked if Frank was still killing people.

"No, no, no. I was living in a nightmare," Frank said. "*Pasé mucho susto*" (roughly, "I had the shivers"). "Every day . . . I . . . I . . . almost couldn't sleep, because I was so scared."

"How many people did you kill?" Jiménez asked.

"Well, about twenty."

More dead air. Jiménez gasped. His sidekick, known on the air as Moonshadow, muttered, "*Diablo!*"

"I can understand perfectly why you didn't tell this to your wife," Jiménez said.

They talked for another minute. The d.j. urged Frank to "continue behaving well," then they hung up. Jiménez instinctively moved on to the next call, but after a few seconds he put the caller on hold and fell silent. "What a difficult situation," he finally said. "Hold on a second. We're still in shock. We're trying to breathe." Someone in the studio asked for a glass of water. "*Diablo!*" Jiménez said. "Twenty people!"

At that moment, Detective Robert Machicote, of the New York Police Department's Twenty-eighth Detective Squad, was driving up the West Side Highway. "I was on my way to work," he recalled. "I was listening to the show, because I'm somewhat of a fan." Frank's confession intrigued him. He called the radio station to investigate, then enlisted the help of a fellow Puerto Rican detective in opening a case.

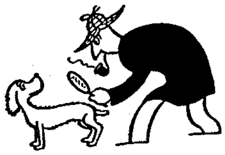
Just as the show went off the air, the detectives dropped by La Mega's Fifty-sixth Street studio, procured a tape of the call, and mentioned that they might check the station's phone records, because Frank had claimed that he was calling from his own house. Maybe they'd be able to trace the call. "It could have been something, or it could have been nothing," Machicote said. "If it's real, then we should do something about it."

A week later, resting in the La Mega studios after another show, Jiménez was still stunned. The caller, he argued, was for real. "His delivery was neutral," Jiménez said. "He had no emotions. He wasn't trying to convince us. This was serious."

—*Patrick Symmes*

THE CASTING COUCH

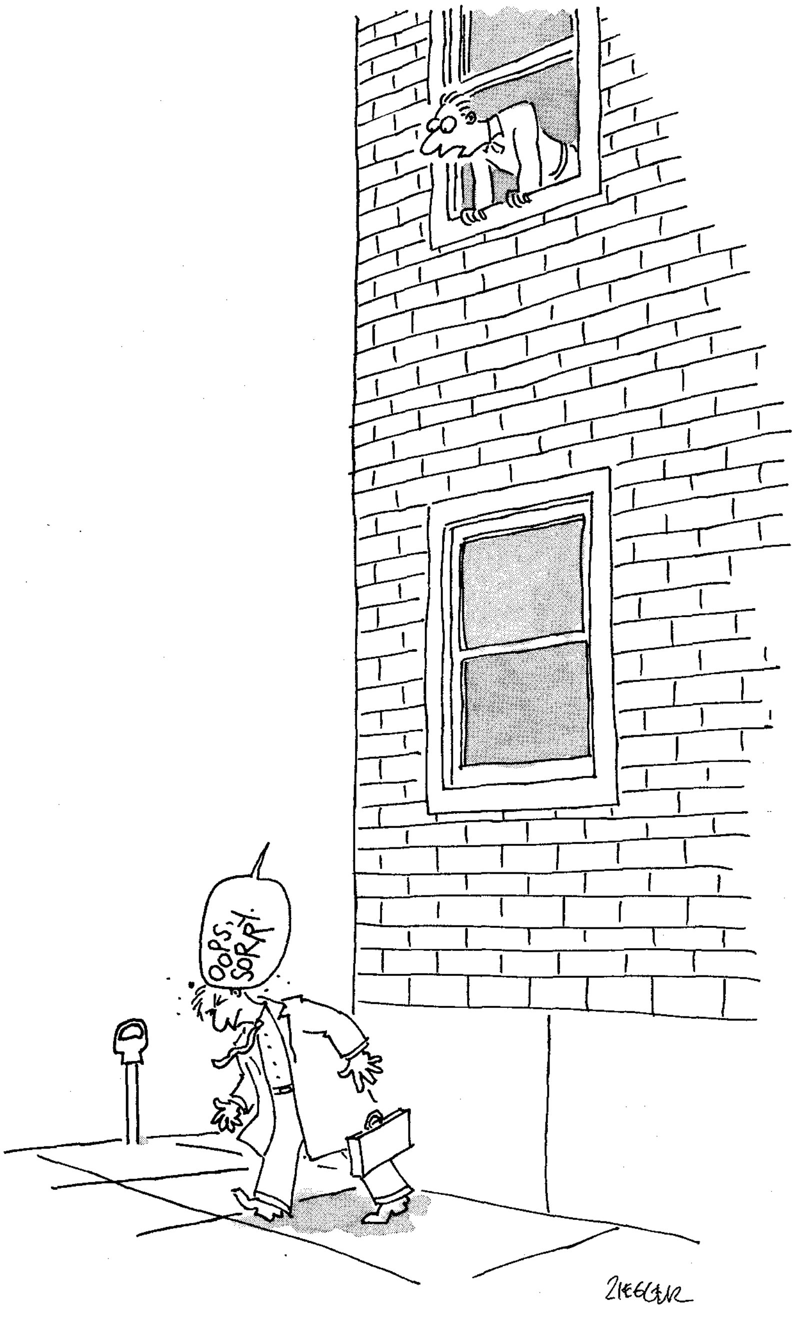
A DOG'S LIFE



To look at Spencer Beglarian, an actor who lives in Los Angeles, you would not guess that he has been typecast as a dog. Beglarian isn't especially canine in appearance—he is slight and neat, with dark hair and gray eyes, and does not bound or slobber as a matter of course. Beglarian, though, is on his way to being the acting world's go-to "dog" guy, in the same way that, say, Jack Black is Hollywood's go-to smart-and-funny fat guy. He has appeared as a dog three times recently: first in a Los Angeles production of "Stray Dog Story," a play by Robert Chesley, in which he had the part of Buddy, a dog who has been turned into a gay man but retains a canine heart and mind; as Sparky the Dog-Man, in an episode of "Sabrina, the Teenage Witch"; and now, in his most substantial dog role so far, in "Dog Days," a short film that will be screened in New York next week, as part of the Independent Feature Project's Buzz Cuts series. The film, directed by Ellie Lee, and based on a short story by Judy Budnitz, is an unsettling family drama set in a grim, post-nuclear American town, and Beglarian plays a man who has taken on the persona of a stray dog named Prince. He hangs around outside a family's home on his hands and knees, wearing a dog suit, hoping for scraps of food and affection. In the process, he serves as a mirror of the family members' humanity or inhumanity. The role is a demanding one: like a real dog, Beglarian has to communicate without speaking, although, unlike a real dog, he doesn't have a tail to wag.

When he is asked how he goes about inhabiting the character of a dog, Beglarian's nose starts to twitch. "I don't think I have become more doglike physically after playing these roles," he said recently, sitting poolside at a Los Angeles hotel—the kind of place where dogs are not allowed. "But philosophically I have. I look at every dog now, and I connect with dogs as I never did before." Although he has become known as someone who gives good dog, Beglarian says that he has never played the same dog twice. He hasn't even played the same breed twice. "In 'Stray Dog,' I imagined I was a Jack Russell terrier—very high-energy," he said. (In the play, he goes to a gay-pride march and starts howling with joy.) "Whereas 'Dog Days' was more like a Labrador—older, slower, but just as constant and intense in his affection. Then Sparky was one of those Australian sheepdogs."

Beglarian does not own a dog, so in order to prepare for his roles he does field work. To get ready to play Buddy, he did some surveillance at a local Starbucks that is popular with dog walkers. "You really can communicate with dogs if you take time to focus and look in their eyes," he said. For "Dog Days," his acting coach was a dog that belonged to one of the film's financial backers. "That dog was rather old, but quite loving," he said. During filming, Beglarian intentionally ate less, so as to be more convincing as a starving dog-man. And he drew upon the discomfort he felt while wearing a furry dog suit in hot weather to convey the



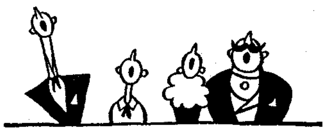
misery of being a post-apocalyptic stray.

Beglarian, who is forty, and who teaches and writes in addition to acting, has come away from his dog studies with more than a killer whimper and a convincing way of cocking his head. There are, he says, life lessons to be learned from the canine world. "I think you can learn patience from dogs," he said. "How to stay with something with persistence, but not in a ferocious, manic way."

In exploring canine nature, he drew upon an early formative experience. "While I was at Yale drama school, I was very depressed for a time," he explained. "One day, I was in New York, in this really small, split-level apartment that belonged to a friend who was trying to make it as an actress. She had a black Lab, and the Lab had a toy. I remember throwing this toy down the stairs. I kept throwing it and throwing it, and there was as much joy on the part of the dog the last time he returned it as there had been the first time. There would have been more joy eternally. It struck me that there's something Zen about that—doing something that might seem menial, but if you have joy in it you are happy. This is a kind of wisdom that dogs have."

—*Rebecca Mead*

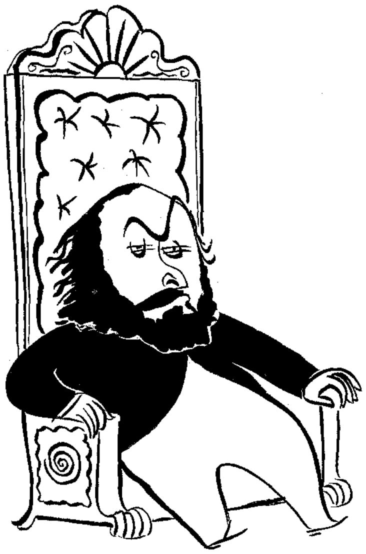
MASTER CLASS
PAVAROTTI WANTS MORE



In the days leading up to a master class that Luciano Pavarotti gave at Juilliard last month, members of the school's staff scrambled to find him just the right chair. Pavarotti's girth is legendary, of course, and recent hip and knee operations have left him less flexible than ever. So the Juilliard staffers were relieved to discover, deep in storage, a wide, thronelike armchair upholstered in red velvet. On the day of the class, they positioned it next to a table on which they had placed bottles of mineral water, a bowl of ice, lemon slices, and a plume of Kleenex.

For the students—there were eight of them, ranging in age from twenty-four to thirty-four—the occasion was nerve-racking. A master class is an awkward hybrid: part lesson, part performance, in front of an audience. On top of that, the students had reason to fear Pavarotti's mood. Critics—including Anthony Tommasini, in the *Times*—had been suggesting, with stinging regularity, that the tenor should think about calling it quits.

And on top of *that* there was the issue of Pavarotti's unorthodox teaching style. He is not known as a highly theoretical singer; people often whisper that he can't even read music. Old hands at Juilliard like to tell a possibly apocryphal tale about how Pavarotti, during a master class years ago, badgered a young baritone into singing well above his normal range. Legend has it that the student's voice didn't recover for days.



Luciano Pavarotti

At the appointed hour, Pavarotti came out onto the broad stage of the Juilliard Theatre wearing a three-piece charcoal-gray suit, a white shirt, and a gold-flecked tie. Forgoing a bow, he settled deeply into his red chair. He picked up a program and considered it. He was all business. "Waldo González is singing . . . 'Una furtiva lagrima'?" he asked, looking over the top of his glasses. "Very good."

González, a twenty-five-year-old tenor from Lufkin, Texas, bounded across the stage. "Una furtiva lagrima" is an aria from Donizetti's opera "L'Elisir d'Amore"; Pavarotti has performed it onstage more than a hundred times. After González finished a lovely, quiet rendition, Pavarotti gave him a sympathetic look. "It's a very difficult aria—I know the experience," he said. "I want you to sing it again, but this time give me *more*."

"More?" González asked.

Pavarotti was smiling but insistent: "Be aggressive. More, more, more!"

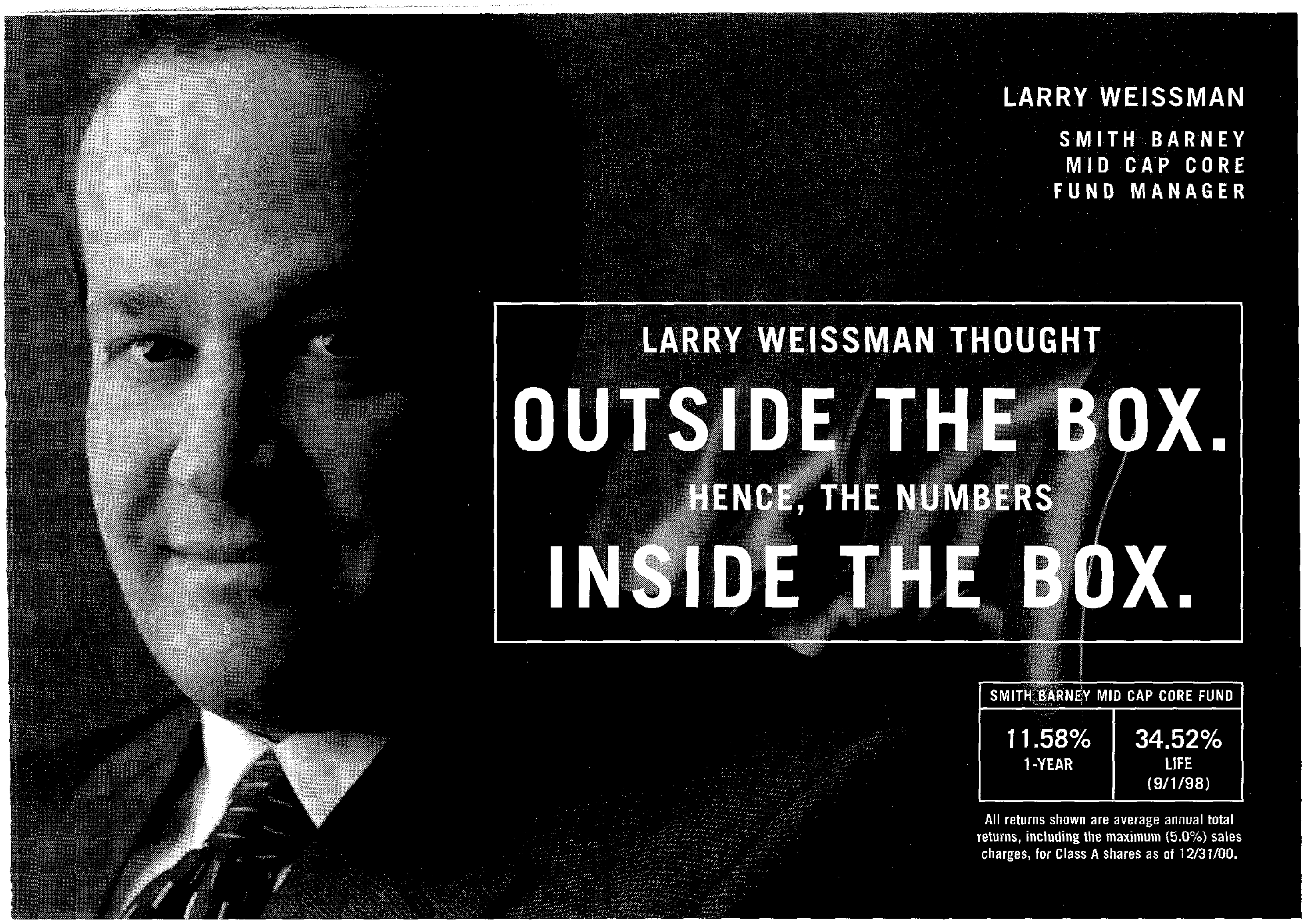
Next up was Bangsool Kim, a Korean soprano, who sang music by Bellini and Gounod. "Full voice, please! More substantial!" Pavarotti said. "Really make it with more voice." And similar advice awaited Young-Bok Kim, a Korean bass baritone, whose name Pavarotti amused himself by pronouncing "Young-*ah* Bok-*ah* Kim-*ah*." "Try to make a bigger voice if you can," he said. "The voice is beautiful. But sell very well your product."

Pavarotti is famous for the power—and the powerful clarity—of his singing. At Juilliard, he was protecting his vocal cords, and never opened up and sang fully. But he was wearing a microphone, so that even when he hummed a phrase the hall was flooded with more sound than the young singers could muster with veins bulging. It was as though they were sharing the stage with a set of supersonic lungs.

The next to last student on the program was a New Zealand tenor named Simon O'Neill, whose face appears above the word "Opera" on a one-dollar New Zealand stamp. He had chosen to sing Donizetti's "Angelo casto e bel," which Pavarotti recorded for the first time in 1968. ("I wanted to do something to remind him of when he was younger," O'Neill said later.) There is a sustained, terrifically high B-flat at the finish of the aria. The first time through, O'Neill settled for a lower tone, like a figure skater who plays it safe by reducing a triple jump to a double. Pavarotti asked O'Neill to sing the aria again, and to cap it off with the high note. He added, "Try to go up without fear."

O'Neill readied himself, took a deep breath, and gave a little nod to the pianist. This time, he grabbed hold of the B-flat and held it, his face throbbing, then reddening, with effort. He finally let go of the note, stumbling a bit to the side as he finished. The audience roared its approval. Pavarotti leaned back, looking satisfied, and said, "Bravo." Then he announced that he wanted to hear the song "one more time, please, from the top."

—*Christopher Hawthorne*



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THE FINANCIAL PAGE
BAD COMPANY

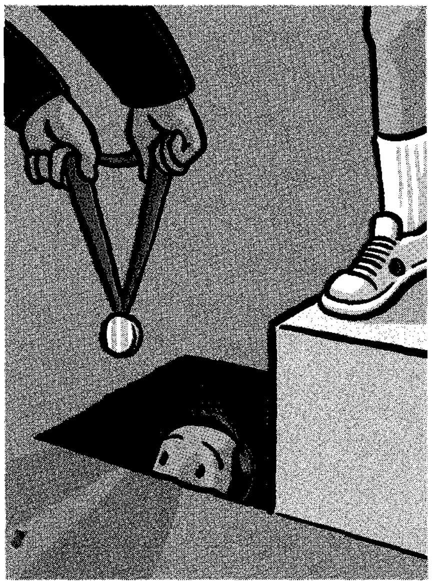
When cadets graduate from West Point, the loudest ovation at commencement traditionally goes not to the valedictorian but, rather, to the "goat"—the man at the bottom of the graduating class. After all, it's not hard to get kicked out or to muddle through. But to slide along the knife's edge, to flirt with failure without failing out: this takes real talent.

In that spirit, then, how about a big round of applause for CKE Restaurants, which may well be the class goat of corporate America? In a recent survey of big companies' reputations (as judged by their industry peers), conducted for *Fortune* by the research firm Clark, Martire & Bartolomeo, CKE—which runs the fast-food chains Carl's Jr., Hardee's, and Taco Bueno—ranked dead last, edging out such wanna-bes as Federal-Mogul, the auto-parts maker, and Warnaco, the apparel manufacturer. Comparisons are odious, and these rankings are a little arbitrary, but, hey, it's an honor just to be nominated. The fact of the matter is, CKE has performed about as poorly as a company can without winding up on skid row. In the process, it has exposed some of the more dubious myths that dominated American business in the nineteen-nineties.

Four years ago, CKE was a Wall Street darling. Bill Foley, who became its C.E.O. in 1994 (he is now its chairman), was acclaimed as a visionary. Carl's Jr. had struggled in the early nineties, but Foley turned it into a winner. The press fawned over his love of chess and his West Point background. (For the record, he was neither valedictorian nor goat.) Analysts were smitten.

All along, CKE did an excellent job of spinning Wall Street. When, in 1999, the company made a deal to sell two hundred million dollars' worth of securities, it hired five different underwriters, a move that may have given analysts at each of those firms an incentive to be nice. One of CKE's more bullish supporters was a boutique investment bank called Cruttenden Roth, of which Bill Foley just happened to own a sizable chunk. CKE was perpetually upbeat in its predictions and, when things went wrong, unfailingly clever in its explanations. When the company started to run into trouble, it blamed, among other things, blizzards, hurricanes, the new millennium, and "negative thinkers in the financial community."

The press and the Street were seduced by CKE's act because it drew on one of corporate America's most enduring fantasies: that of the turnaround artist, the swaggering outsider who rides into town and cleans up the mess that the previous regime left behind. In the eighties, you had Sanford Sigoloff and Victor Palmieri, whose rescue operations at floundering companies earned them a reputation as "the Green Berets of corporate management." In the nineties, you had "Chainsaw" Al Dunlap (another West Pointer), who became a star for saving Scott Paper and for boldly setting forth to do the same at Sunbeam.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Chainsaw Al's success with Scott Paper duped Wall Street into thinking he could pull it off wherever he went. Likewise, Foley, having turned around Carl's Jr., convinced himself and everyone else that he shouldn't keep his light under a bushel. "A lot of restaurant companies out there are pretty goofed up," he said in 1998, and he was just the man to ungoof them. Over a two-year period, CKE spent almost eight hundred million dollars, in two separate deals, to acquire the Hardee's name and the ownership of more than fourteen hundred Hardee's restaurants. Hardee's was in bad shape, and the price was steep. But Foley could fix it, right? Foley could fix anything.

Not this time. Hardee's soon turned into CKE's Vietnam. As a result of the deals, CKE's debt ballooned to more than five hundred million dollars. Then the company spent almost a hundred million dollars more to remodel the restaurants. Foley, meanwhile, was giving much of his attention to other ventures, like a title-insurance company he was running (go figure). More important, the formula that had worked so well with Carl's Jr.—cutting costs and avoiding price wars—didn't apply to Hardee's, which had deep-seated operational problems. Now CKE is hemorrhaging cash, and its stock price is a tenth of what it was in July of 1998. It has had three C.E.O.s in the past year and a half. (Foley stepped down last March to devote more time to the title-insurance company.) And it has started selling Hardee's restaurants—at a sharp discount—to raise cash to satisfy creditors.

There are many good excuses for what happened to CKE, and its executives have trotted out most of them. But you won't hear this one: that they succumbed to what's known as "C.E.O. hubris." Just because you fixed one company doesn't mean you can fix them all. When Gil Amelio took over Apple Computer, he was a legend for rescuing National Semiconductor. He's a legend no more. Neither is Al Dunlap, who, in the end, destroyed Sunbeam. There is no one-size-fits-all turnaround formula, and the people who come to believe that they have one end up taking on insurmountable challenges and buying unsalvageable companies. In a recent study, Donald Hambrick and Matthew Hayward, professors of management, found that the more acclaimed a C.E.O. was—by the media and his peers—the more likely he was to make acquisitions at unreasonable prices, just as Foley did with Hardee's. Most acquisitions don't work out, and the chances of success shrink even more when you overpay. But then no one ever finished last in his class by thinking small. Consider the most famous goat in West Point history: George Armstrong Custer.

—*James Surowiecki*

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NEW YORK JOURNAL

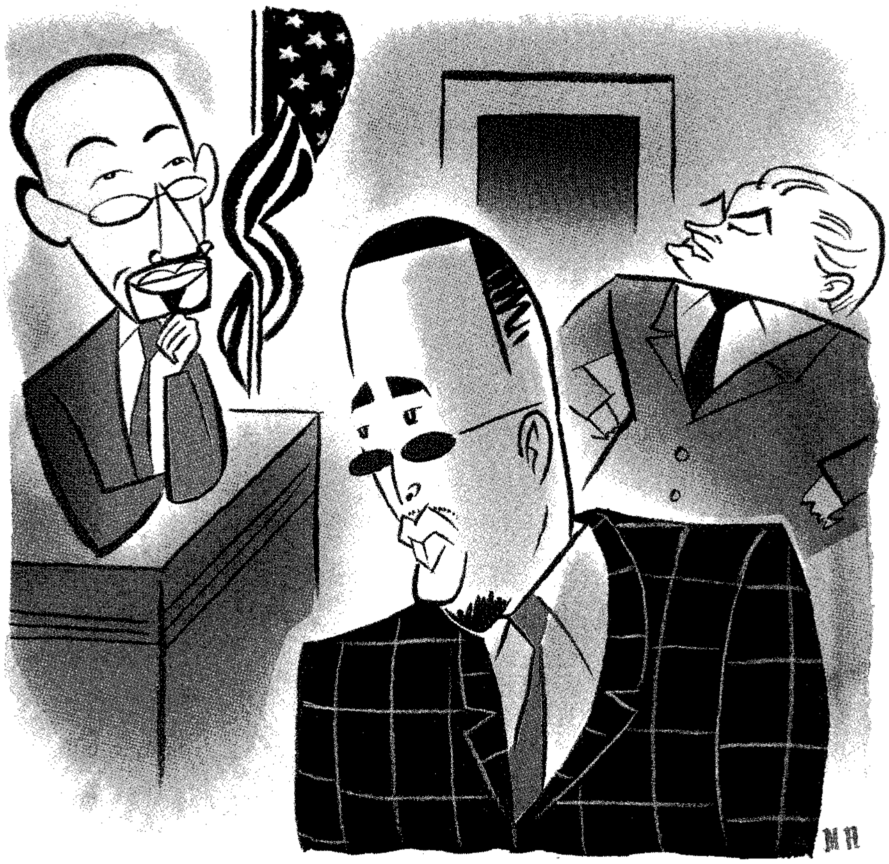
YO COMMA DOG

A night club, a car chase, and the making of Puff Daddy.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Everybody seemed to be having a good time at the Puff Daddy trial, except, of course, Puffy. The press was having a good time because, as one reporter said, “this is the first big trial in the city in years that doesn’t have someone either shot dead by cops or with a broom handle up his rectum.” Johnnie Cochran was having a good time because he got to give his Palm Beach suits an airing without actually having to argue a case; he mostly sat back and listened to his Danny De Vito-look-alike co-counsel, Ben Brafman, bark at the witnesses. Judge Charles Solomon, a first-class bench ironist of the old vintage, got to give his mouth and eyebrows a workout at the defense antics, specializing in an openmouthed, “You really mean that, Counsellor? You really, truly mean that?” expression. There were the rich incidental pleasures of seeing a middle-aged lawyer shyly modelling a black mink coat in the middle of the courtroom, and the still richer ones of hearing the phrase “mingling with his entourage” repeated three times within thirty seconds in sworn testimony.

Even Assistant District Attorney Matthew Bogdanos, prosecuting the case, seemed to be having a good time, in the Dewey-Rudy manner of one who has arrived at a moral conclusion about himself. He sat ostentatiously alone at the prosecutor’s table (his aides were all set back behind, among the spectators), tiny, wholesome, and indignant. Every morning, he remained in shirtsleeves until the last moment, slipping his jacket on just as the jury came in. He was, it seemed, purposefully playing Rick Schroder to Brafman’s De Vito, and he gave the energetic impression that he had interviewed the witnesses, taken on the bad guys, and collected the bail money, and intended to lock up the malefactors, all by himself. Murray Richman, the defense counsel for the rapper Jamal (Shyne) Barrow, protested mildly at one point that Bogdanos was inserting himself as “a figure in the trial, and, let me add, an action figure.” Only Puffy looked disconsolate. His girlfriend had left him—he had announced that this was so on Valentine’s Day, in order to look more forlorn, but, still, she had left him (“Her desire to be around Puffy went out the window right after the gun did” was how one spectator put it)—and the evidence was piling up against him, or seemed to be, as the jury listened for two days to his former part-time chauffeur singing like a canary. Puffy—Sean Combs, as he is known in court, the “King of Hip-Hop,” as he is known in the tabloids—had even had to take the oversized diamond studs out of his ears, and he and his bodyguard Anthony (Wolf) Jones had been dressing for the trial in black sweaters and gray pants and white shirts, which gave them the look of overage Catholic schoolboys. So he sat slumped and sullen at the defense table—brooding, it seemed, like Richard III at the end of *his* reign, on the vicissitudes of fate, the inconstancy of woman, and the treachery of hired livery.



Fenderson, the prosecution’s main witness, was as interesting a character as Puffy.

MARCELLUS HALL

The matter of the trial—not easily grasped, even by all the participants—involved a complicated exchange of symbols and shots which had taken place in a New York night club, and then on a New York street, in “the early morning hours” of December 27, 1999. The night before, Combs had been with his girlfriend, the singer and actress Jennifer Lopez, at his house in East Hampton and had suddenly got a hankering to come back into town, where he owns a building at 813 Park Avenue. A stretch limousine drove them from the South Fork to Combs’s recording studio, on West Forty-fourth Street, where they were joined by a second car, a Lincoln Navigator, driven by Wardel Fenderson, the weekend chauffeur.

After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between the studio and the two cars, Combs and Lopez decided to walk over to Club New York, just around the corner, on West Forty-third Street, and both the limo and the Navigator followed, at a stately, wary pace. (Puffy's entourage, though it seemed to grow and collapse during the night like a soufflé, at this point included another bodyguard, Curtis Howard, and the rapper and Puffy protégé Shyne.) A couple of hours later, a somewhat mysterious figure named Scar, in a gesture reminiscent of the second act of "La Traviata," threw a handful of cash in Puffy's face to indicate, perhaps, that he was prostituting hip-hop, was only in it for the money, a whore. Shyne, outraged at the insult to his liege, fired—either theatrically into the air or recklessly into the crowd, depending on whom you believe. In any case, three people were hit by bullets, one woman quite badly, in the face. Then Combs and Lopez, along with Wolf Jones, who had arrived late at the club, ran out to the street, got into the Navigator, and sped off, with two police cars in pursuit. What, exactly, happened between that moment and the moment, sixty seconds or so later, when the Navigator was stopped by the police—and then what happened after that, when the entire party arrived at the Midtown North police station—was what was in dispute at the trial, and what had led to Combs's indictment for possession of a weapon and for attempting to bribe a witness.

The trial, it was clear, would turn pretty much entirely on the driver's presumably damning account of those opaque moments, and a full house showed up when Wardel Fenderson took the stand, on Thursday, February 15th. Fenderson, a man who never got out of a car without exiting a vehicle, turned out to be, in his way, as interesting a character as Puffy. If Combs was cast as a version of Ralph Ellison's Rinehart, the spellbinding street hustler, Fenderson was another Ellison type, the Autodidactic Striver. He gave long, narrative answers to every question, drew elaborate metaphors—"Are you finished?" Brafman barked at him during a particularly complex image that involved a deer caught in the headlights of a car that blundered onto a highway—and offered elegant rephrasings of flat remarks. At one point, Bogdanos asked him if the pants and the top of the sweatsuit that Combs was wearing that night were the same color. "They appeared to be coördinates," Fenderson replied.

Fenderson, who looks a little like an elongated Spike Lee, began his testimony by explaining that he was born (like Puffy, though he didn't say that) in East Harlem, forty-two years ago, had lived most of his life there, and had only recently moved to New Jersey. He had forty-nine credits at SUNY Binghamton, but "regretfully, I didn't complete my degree." He explained that he had been a cabbie for a while ("I began my professional driving career" in January of 1979) before becoming a livery driver. In late 1999, Puffy's weekend chauffeur had to have an operation and asked him if he'd hold down the job. There were two cars to care for, Fenderson explained, a Lincoln Navigator and a Bentley Armage.

On the twenty-sixth, he went on, he had been home, celebrating Christmas a day late with his daughter, Tamiqua, when a call came in: "Get ready to work! Puff's coming in to town." He got to the studio at eleven-thirty. "It's a frenzied atmosphere there," he explained. "Just a buzz of activity there." People were constantly getting in and out of the Navigator. After one of these entrances, Fenderson looked around. "And at this time I glanced over my shoulder, I was shocked, because I saw Mr. Combs holding in his hand a black handgun." He was holding it in his right hand, and holding it to one side. Fenderson was frightened, because "the bullet is going to hit me if this gun discharges." He asked himself, "What in God's name is he doing holding a gun!," and then watched Puffy tuck the gun into the waistband of his Sean John sweatsuit. (Sean John is the pret-à-porter line in Puffy's couturier business.) "I'm in shock," Fenderson went on. "What's he doing with a gun? Curtis is the armed security. What is he doing with a gun?"

A couple of hours after Lopez and Combs got to the club, he went on, he got a call on the car phone telling him that they were ready to leave, and he moved the car directly in front of the

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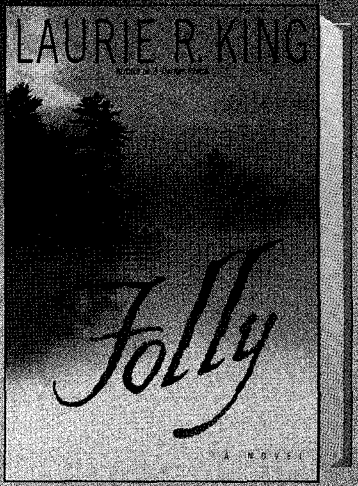

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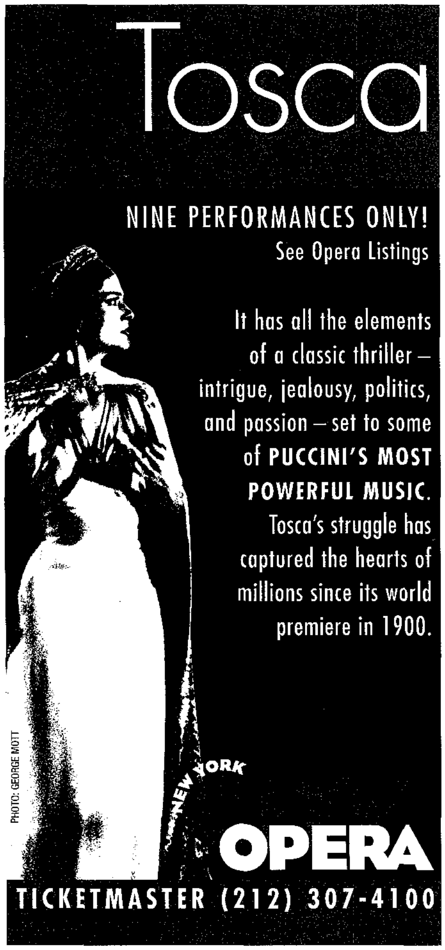
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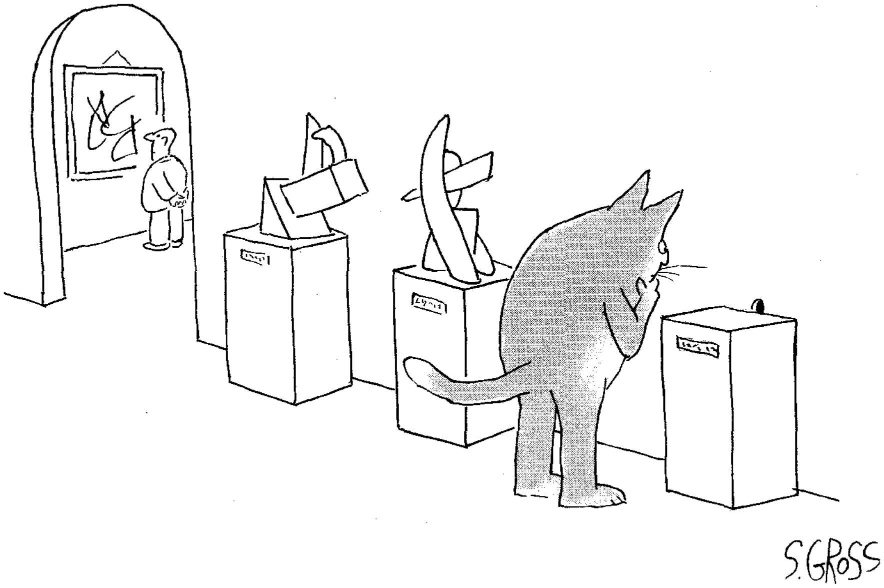
club's entrance. He heard people yelling "They're shooting! They're shooting inside!" and, he explained, "I'm in a heightened sense of alertness now." A few moments later, Combs and Howard came out of the club, but Puffy wouldn't leave without Jennifer. She appeared a few moments later, escorted by Jones. "Shyne busted off in the air!" she shouted, meaning that he had fired his gun at the ceiling.

Two police cars had left Fenderson an out on Forty-third, and he drove through it ("I navigated the Navigator") and turned onto Eighth. (His speed, he explained moments later, was "not reckless but hurried.") Bogdanos had him act out the scene for the jury, taking all the parts: "It was like something out of a movie. They're screaming, 'Don't stop, don't stop, keep going,' then they're calling to me, do I know how to open the stash? 'Yo, Dog, you know how to open the stash?' " The stash, he deduced, was a secret compartment somewhere in the car which no one had told him about. ("Dog," or "Dawg," is, everyone agrees, a term of affection, with a presumption of intimacy; Fenderson could be dawgged, but he could not dawg in return.) Meanwhile, it seemed, one of the car windows opened; a gun was later found on the avenue. Jones reached down, he went on, to search for the stash, and as he did Fenderson noticed another gun, this one in Jones's waistband, beneath his mink coat. Fenderson was intensely relieved when, at last, that police car cut him off at Fifty-fourth Street. "The chase is over, I'm stopping," he quoted himself as saying.

Bogdanos then drew out the rest of the story: how in the police station, in front of the desk sergeant, Combs had leaned over to him and whispered, "I will give you fifty thousand dollars to say the gun is yours"—and, in the courtroom, Fenderson leaned over conspiratorially and spoke, Puffy style, out of the side of his mouth. Then he explained that both Jones and Puffy had pressured him in the holding cell ("I would take the gun for Puff, but I'm a predicate felon," Wolf had said sportingly) and that first he had gone along and then thought better of it. Finally, a voice-mail message in which Puffy was heard promising to make Fenderson's family "comfortable" was introduced in evidence of bribery.

It was all good stuff, and the moment Fenderson's testimony ended the reporters, who still live in the stone age of transcription, rushed out into the halls, desperately scribbling notes, to call in the story on their cell phones. "Yo comma dog period he said open quote you know where the stash S-T-A-S-H is question mark close quote," one reporter declaimed, careful to get the words exactly right.

At one point during Fenderson's testimony, one of the defense attorneys referred to the rapper called Twister. "Not Twister—Twista!" Fenderson corrected. "I have to confess, I'm



not a hip-hop enthusiast," the lawyer admitted, and Fenderson said neither was he. It was odd, certainly, that, although the defendants were richer and more famous than anyone who had been on trial in that courtroom before, their lawyers wanted to shun the peculiar aura of their celebrity. "Hip-hop is not on trial here" is how someone put it, meaning, of course, that it was. A couple of decades after it emerged, in the Bronx, hip-hop remains the pig in the python of American culture—the indisputably new thing that refuses to get digested.

In the classic American pattern, after all, children instruct their parents to love what they once shunned: transported to America, Miranda, surprise, prefers Caliban's grunts to Ariel's songs and then, even greater surprise, Prospero comes to prefer them, too, and Ariel is left as a lounge act, or trying to get on "MTV Unplugged." In the case of hip-hop, the normal twenty-year cycle of shock and acceptance has been broken: Caliban raps, Miranda swoons, but Prospero remains unmoved and keeps playing his old Ariel CDs. (How many possible ways can you hear the same Beatles records? An endless number, apparently.) Marvin Gaye, a cocaine addict shot with his own gun by his own father, was, almost immediately, a saint of pop humanism, a man you played at weddings. The Notorious B.I.G., dead four years, remains largely notorious.

Theories exist to explain this, and all of them have been aired in the corridors during the recesses of the Puffy trial. The first theory, beloved of criminal-defense attorneys and the pop-music critics of the *Times,* is that rap and its artists just can't get a break from the watchdogs of the white middle classes: the cops and the critics both take them too literally. What are essentially signs and symbols in "distanced narratives" are treated as threats. Yet highbrow resistance to rap long ago crumbled—the *Times* is much kinder to Eminem than it ever was to Billy Joel—and, as for the police, well, it is hard to miss guns going off in people's faces, automatics flying out of car windows onto the street. The second theory, fondly held by middle-class parents, is that rap remains undigested because it is indi-

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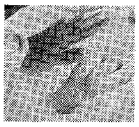

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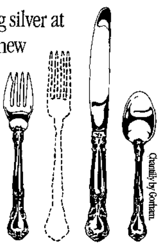
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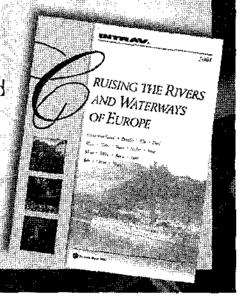

gestible. Yet this, in turn, involves a little back-page revision of the parents' own music—suicide and cocaine, the rock vices, being judged more obviously wholesome than homicide and Dom Perignon, the rapper's.

The truth is, perhaps, that hip-hop labors under a peculiar set of problems, which keep it uneasily ricocheting back and forth between symbols and shots. Fenderson's key question—"What was he doing with a gun?"—was more complicated than it sounded; but, to get its significance, you have to accent "he" rather than "gun." Puffy's real ambition, as his admirers admit, had always been to disarm rap. (His hardcore hip-hop detractors think this, too; they regard him as the Lawrence Welk of the woollen-cap crowd.) If Puffy was a Rinehart figure, it was by an act of conscious striving and self-education. There was a lot of Fenderson in him, too. He was, it's true, born in East Harlem in 1969, and his father, Melvin, was a street hustler, who was killed by a drug dealer in Central Park when his son was three. (This scene recurs in Combs's work.) But, as his admirers are less anxious to underline, Combs's mother moved the family to Mount Vernon, in Westchester County, when her son was twelve, and he attended Mount St. Michael Academy, a good all-boys Catholic school, and, later on, Howard University. It was, in fact, as an impresario, a concert promoter at Howard, that he found his calling, and in 1988 he left Howard to go to work not as a rapper but as an A. & R. man for Andre Harrell's Uptown Records. He was so skilled at promotion that, five years later, after being fired by Harrell, he spun off his own label, Bad Boy Records, and, in 1996, he created a fifty-fifty partnership with Clive Davis's Arista, reportedly receiving six million dollars.

Bad things kept happening, though. A celebrity basketball game that he organized in 1991 turned into a stampede. Nine people died. And then Combs got involved in the famous "East Coast–West Coast" feud with Suge Knight's Los Angeles-based Death Row Records, and this, after violent turns and betrayals that would require a Jacobean playwright to relate, led, in 1996, to the murder of Death Row's star, Tupac Shakur, and then, a year later, to the murder of Puffy's star, Christopher Wallace, the Notorious B.I.G. Puffy, oddly, is usually exempted as an actor from these events. "Puffy Daddy & Family made no direct involvement in this east coast-west coast fight and Puff Daddy now gives shout-outs to 2Pac saying R. I. P." is how one fanzine Web page puts it, although how Tupac feels about this posthumous encouragement is hard to say. (Some intelligent observers believe that Combs is still scared to death of Suge Knight, and that that explains, without any need for auxiliary epicycles about the aesthetics of rap, what he was doing with a gun.)

Combs's first album, therefore, was made after he was already legendary as a businessman—a requiem for B.I.G., released in 1997 and called "No Way Out." (It was originally to have been called "Hell Up in Harlem.") "No Way Out," which sold seven million copies, was intended as a self-conscious masterpiece in the manner of "What's Going On." It is, once you get past the admittedly repellent surface (though if we are instructed to indulge Richard Pryor's "niggers" and "bitches" it is hard to see in principle why we can't indulge Puffy's), an impressive, lugubrious musical collage, including samples of Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings, the Police's "Every Breath You Take," Roberta Flack's "Jesse," an ironic borrowing of Grandmaster Flash's "The Message," of 1982 (one of the first hip-hop hits), and orchestrations of gunfire, thunderstorms, and weeping women. But the gunfire is self-directed. "No Way Out" contains no rhetoric of violence, just fantasies of victimization. Like Sinatra in his classic period, Puffy is always either boasting or moaning, but never threatening. "If I Should Die Tonight," for instance, is a fatalistic adolescent fantasy of going before your time. ("If I should die, tonight ba-by / We'll see / Won't it be far before my time?") What's most striking about the record isn't the expected nihilism but the sadness and the way the sadness is set off by an unalloyed, relentless materialism. ("Got nice watches, nice cars, nice bitches and rings / Guess it's safe to say a nigga like me got nice things.") Only an occasional sidewise reference to Puffy's son, Justin, suggests values other than those of a 1961 issue of *Playboy*. If Thomas Hobbes and Hugh Hefner had collabo-

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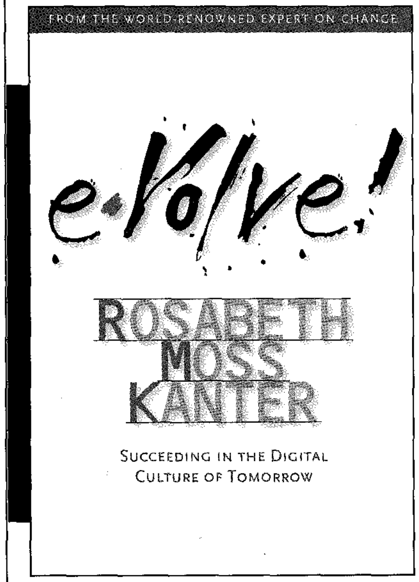

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rated on a pop record, "No Way Out" is the one they would have made.

In one sense, the enormous success among white kids of "No Way Out" also conforms to a classic American pattern: the straight, and straitened, majority looks to a "primitive" subculture for the secure family identity it lacks. In the past, though, the blood society (Western gunfighters, the Mafia) always pretended to have some archaic virtue—loyalty, or feudal honor—to ennoble its killings. In the Puffy version of hip-hop, what the outlaw subculture offered was simply an aggrieved parody of the acquisitive society around it. Life is not a jungle but a mall, enlivened by stick-ups. The world is sampled, not remade. There is no honor, no particular blood loyalty, just sex, fear, and shopping, same as the rest of us. (Chris Rock made a very funny parody of hip-hop music which consists of a Puffy figure playing someone else's record while whispering "Cristal!") God is Puffy's best friend, to be sure—he says so in the album notes—but you have to search the fine print to find this out.

The path that Puffy set for himself, therefore, was not from Harlem to the world but from Westchester to East Hampton—and the irony was that the path lay through Harlem, a Harlem of the mind and mouth, and you sometimes had to carry a gun to show that you had been there. Berry Gordy, at Motown Records in the sixties, who was thuggish in many ways, made music for young urban blacks and called it "the Sound of Young America"; Puffy Combs, making rap for kids in Westchester, has to call his label Bad Boy. He constantly has to assert an outlaw status he never really had. The essential contradiction built into every defense of rap has become a cage for him. On the one hand, hip-hop must never be taken too literally—the references to violence, faggots, and "niggas" are representations, mere signs—while, on the other hand, it cannot be taken literally enough: it is "the CNN of the inner city," full of brave reports on real events, the truths America does not want to witness. Puffy was whipsawed between the two self-cancelling notions—he had to act up and act out, live it and not live it. Where most gangsters have to pretend to be entrepreneurs ("I'm just a businessman, Your Honor"), he was essentially an entrepreneur who, for business reasons, had to act like a gangster.

This illuminates, if it does not explain, the peculiar poignancy of his situation, and the look of outraged innocence, annoyance, on his face. He was no Notorious B.I.G., a Billy the Kid of the streets, more or less expecting to die in "a hail of bullets." He intended to be Berry Gordy, and, at many moments, he was right on the verge of seeing it happen; it *had* happened, in fact—he had Park Avenue and East Hampton. But Park Avenue and East Hampton turned out to be slipperier symbols than had been promised. That he could buy them changed their meaning. The proof that he had really transformed himself and his style still eluded him. Every time it seemed about to arrive, a gun went off.

The courtroom was eager to see what Brafman would do to Fenderson the next day (an earlier, late-afternoon encounter had drawn no blood), but the event of the morning was Puffy's suit. Apparently fed up with the imprisonment of the black sweaters, Puffy had turned up in a masterpiece: a three-piece, obviously bespoke suit on a Versace model, pale-gray-and-soft-blue windowpane check with a white linen pocket square. It put his lawyers to shame. Cochran was wearing the kind of beige-white suit with a hand-painted tie that goes over big at the Beverly Hills Hotel but makes a lawyer look like a rube in a New York winter, while Brafman was in the kind of gray suit that expensive tailors tell short men will make them look distinguished when it merely makes them look drab. Richman, just to Puffy's right, had on French cuffs—if Rudy ever really wants to put big-time criminal-defense attorneys out of business, he need only place an embargo on cufflinks, and they will all be helpless—and the cuffs were monogrammed.

Brafman got started, trying to justify his reputation as a man who makes prosecution witnesses tremble, but he is like a fighter who throws everything out in the first round and then stands back and waits for his opponent to fall. If the other guy doesn't, he's puzzled about what to do. Fenderson had obviously been well coached by the district attorney, and the coaching ("I had no

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reason at that point to make a mental note of how people were entering and exiting"), on top of his own loquaciousness ("You were with him for seventeen hours?" "Yes, sir. Seventeen *grueling* hours"), made him a monument in impregnable long-windedness. (Once, after the judge had admonished Brafman, Fenderson joined in: "No badgering the witness!")

Unable to shake the central facts of his story, Brafman, in his two days of cross-examination, was reduced to playing the old Dickensian game of edifying browbeating—breaking down a sixty-second chase up Eighth Avenue into tiny, discrete bits, and then showing that each bit didn't perfectly match the one alongside it. ("And when did you see this light? At Forty-fourth Street? Forty-fifth? But Mr. Fenderson, in your grand-jury testimony do you recall being asked these questions and giving these answers?" etc.) Fenderson was, at one point, forced to say, "His exact words were—now don't quote me on this—" to much laughter, but in fact he knew the exact words ("If you take the gun, I will give you fifty thousand dollars") and just couldn't swear which clause came first. Brafman eventually passed the witness on to Jones's lawyer, and this led to the lawyer's modelling the mink—he looked like a college-football fan in a twenties comedy—to show that no gun could be seen there, either. (This what-the-well-dressed-thug-is-wearing theme came up again the following day, when Bogdanos tried, and failed, to show that a gun would have fit neatly into Puffy's sweatsuit pocket.)

The afternoon before Puffy was to testify, last Wednesday, he was seen working out at the David Barton gym, up on Madison and Eighty-fifth. It is an expensive, chic place, where you can read your E-mail and watch trailers for new movies as you pedal the stationary bike—the kind of mixed-up moneyed place where brokers' wives Strollercize with their children in the morning, and the man who discovered the Notorious B.I.G. lifts weights in the afternoon.

In court the next day, Puffy arrived in a white shirt and a silver-blue silk tie. Johnnie Cochran, who had finally put in some time as a cross-examiner, was in gray, someone having apparently spoken to him. Combs stuck to an unyielding, untroubled no: he had never seen a gun, he had never held a gun, he had not seen a gun even when he heard shots, there were no guns in the cars, there were no bribes in the cell, nothing happened that he made happen at all. Observers in the courtroom thought that Bogdanos scored reasonably well—he hit but didn't draw blood—by dramatizing a violent incident from Puffy's past. But, at the end of the day, Combs seemed reasonable and unthuggish, if still annoyed. The moment he finished, the defense rested. Johnnie Cochran gave him a hug. J. Lo would not descend. One or two reporters sighed.

The jury, which looks as though it had been parachuted in from the No. 6 line (no one dresses for the occasion, jeans and sweaters being the biracial expression of the call of citizenship), watches stolidly and impassively, as though expecting the train to be moving shortly. The defense, in its summation, will try to poke more holes in Fenderson's story and, more generally, show that the rappers are "really on trial for their life style" rather than for a specific crime. Bogdanos will try to dissuade the jury from such cautious semiotic parsing; loaded symbols go off in crowded night clubs, too.

There is a feeling around that Puffy may get off lightly. This is hard to explain but is, perhaps, due to a slowly growing pile of evidence suggesting that, whatever stupidity he may have shown, he was a singularly unskilled criminal. (Even Steve Dunleavy, in the *Post*, has announced that Puffy reminds him of Sinatra: no real thug, though a cause of thuggery in others.) Perhaps there is something subtler at work, too. The trial keeps returning, strangely but inexorably, to questions of tailoring. The defense now hinges on whether Puffy could have stuffed a revolver in his color-coördinated Sean John sweatsuit, whether Wolf could have packed heat under his mink. Given those preoccupations, it seems possible that the courtroom's prejudices may resolve in favor of the well dressed. As you looked at Puffy at the defense table, an island of quietly bespoke checks in a sea of monogrammed cuffs, it was hard not to feel that he had already suffered enough. ♦

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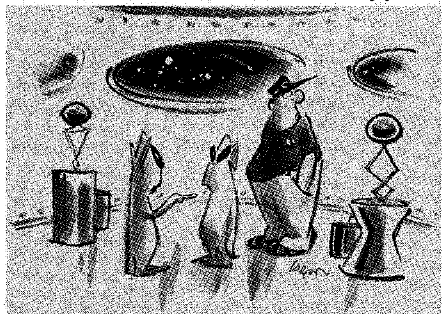
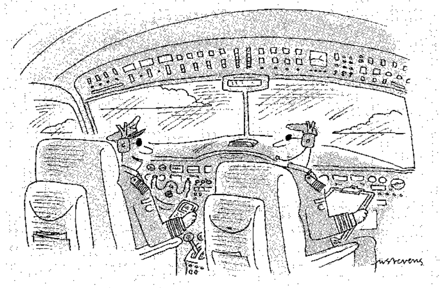
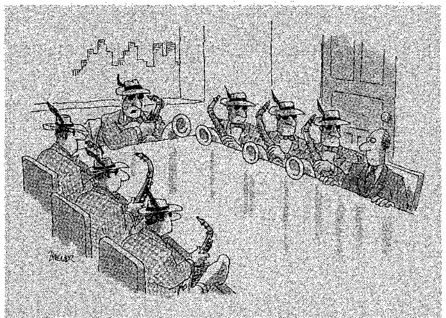


"You abducted him—you feed him."



"This is so cool! I'm flying this thing completely on my Palm pilot!"



"Damn it, Hopkins, didn't you get yesterday's memo?"

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YOUR F.B.I. IS ON THE CASE

BY BRUCE McCALL

To: the Director (Eyes Only)
Re: **Hanssen, Robert Philip**
Case Officer's Detainee Activity Report, 02/24/01-03/06/01

02/24: Subject claimed he was "getting rusty" after six days in custody, so volunteered to teach advanced counterespionage course to senior undercover F.B.I. agents. Proposal approved 02/25. Rationale: Smartest man in the bureau. Evidence: Subject paid for F.B.I.-cafeteria lunches with rubles, said miniature camera in one incisor was "a gift from Uncle Ivan," drove Volga sedan, yet F.B.I. did not ID subject as Russian mole for fifteen years. Conclusion: F.B.I. clearly can learn from an agent this clever.

03/01: Classroom Surveillance Summary.

Lecture 1: "Hello, Moscow, Hello—Telephone Etiquette in a Clandestine World." Subject had agents reveal top-secret information, which he then called in to Moscow spy hot line, collect, in a "live" demonstration of proper telephone manners on a non-secure line. Excellent class participation. Moscow spy-hot-line phone number not divulged: subject explained it is unlisted.

03/02: Subject's request to appear on "Larry King Live" and apologize for misdeeds O.K.'d. Rationale: Positive publicity bonanza for F.B.I. Case Officer's Supporting Brief: Vetted subject's prepared script for security violations. None found. Script rambles incomprehensibly.

Examples:

"Mr. Blue will be causing Mr. Pink no more trouble."

"Stay away from Aunt Minnie's. The bees have found the honey."

"Our Finnish flatware-salesman friend is expecting a big shipment."

03/03: Subject claimed he is a body double for the real Robert Philip Hanssen, planted as part of Russian disinformation plot. Demanded immediate freedom. Claim under urgent consideration. Insight: Diabolical enough to be true. Russians would indeed make sure stand-in looked exactly like Hanssen, and subject does. (Even has same fingerprints.)

03/04: Prisoner Observation Summary.

Subject behaves like model prisoner. Asks for nothing except various electronic gadgets. Spends cell time talking to wristwatch, hollowing out chessmen, writing letters addressed to rocks in D.C.-area parks. Letters forwarded. Security-risk rating: zero (unreadable: written in invisible ink).

03/05: Russian Embassy delivers package containing personal belongings requested by subject for sentimental reasons: shortwave radio, codebooks, fountain-pen laser gun, Swiss passport, airline tickets, false nose and mustache, etc. (ineptly identified by Russians as "pajamas and slippers").

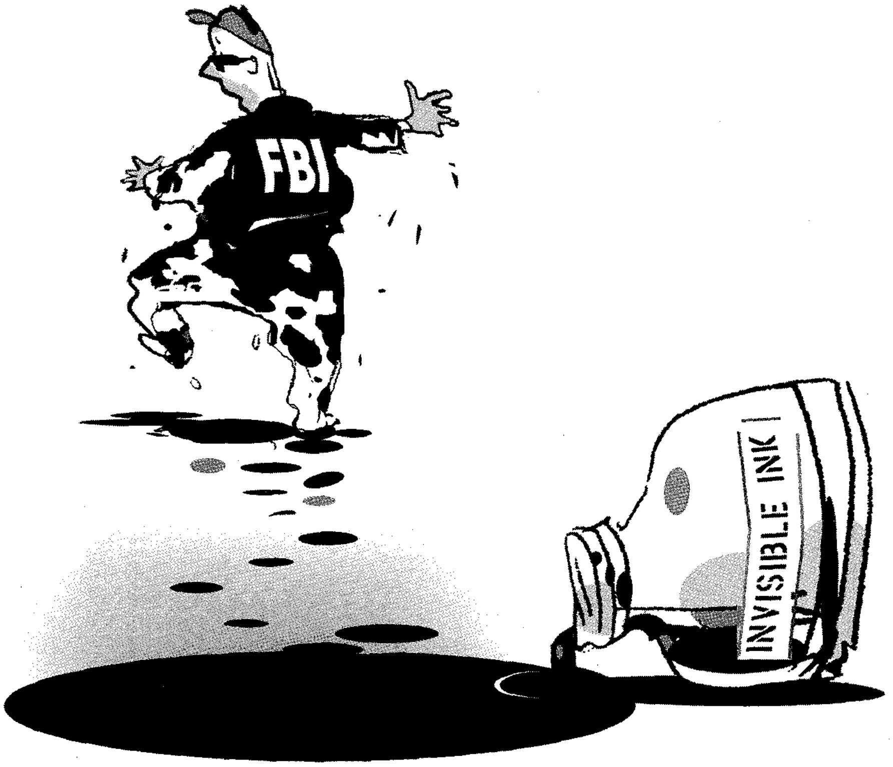
Case Officer Addendum: Hanssen case leaves F.B.I. *big* winner in prestige war vs. Russian Secret Service. Evidence: Impromptu encounter on 03/05 between this officer and attractive young Russian orphan girl. Gist: Her opening words, "K.G.B. stupid! No match for clever F.B.I.!" Asks Case Officer how F.B.I. caught on, for high-school newspaper back home. Case Officer opens briefcase to get file but passes out. (Had had three "special Russian cocktails" with orphan girl.) Has reported briefcase missing.

03/06: Subject remains under Code Blue surveillance to guard against possible Russian Secret Service rescue/evacuation op.

Item: Guards on twenty-four-hour alert for birthday cake containing file.

Item: Bathroom visits now monitored.

Update: Subject in bathroom for past two hours; will walkie-talkie agent for status report when noise conditions more favorable. Voice communication degraded by helicopter immediately overhead. ♦



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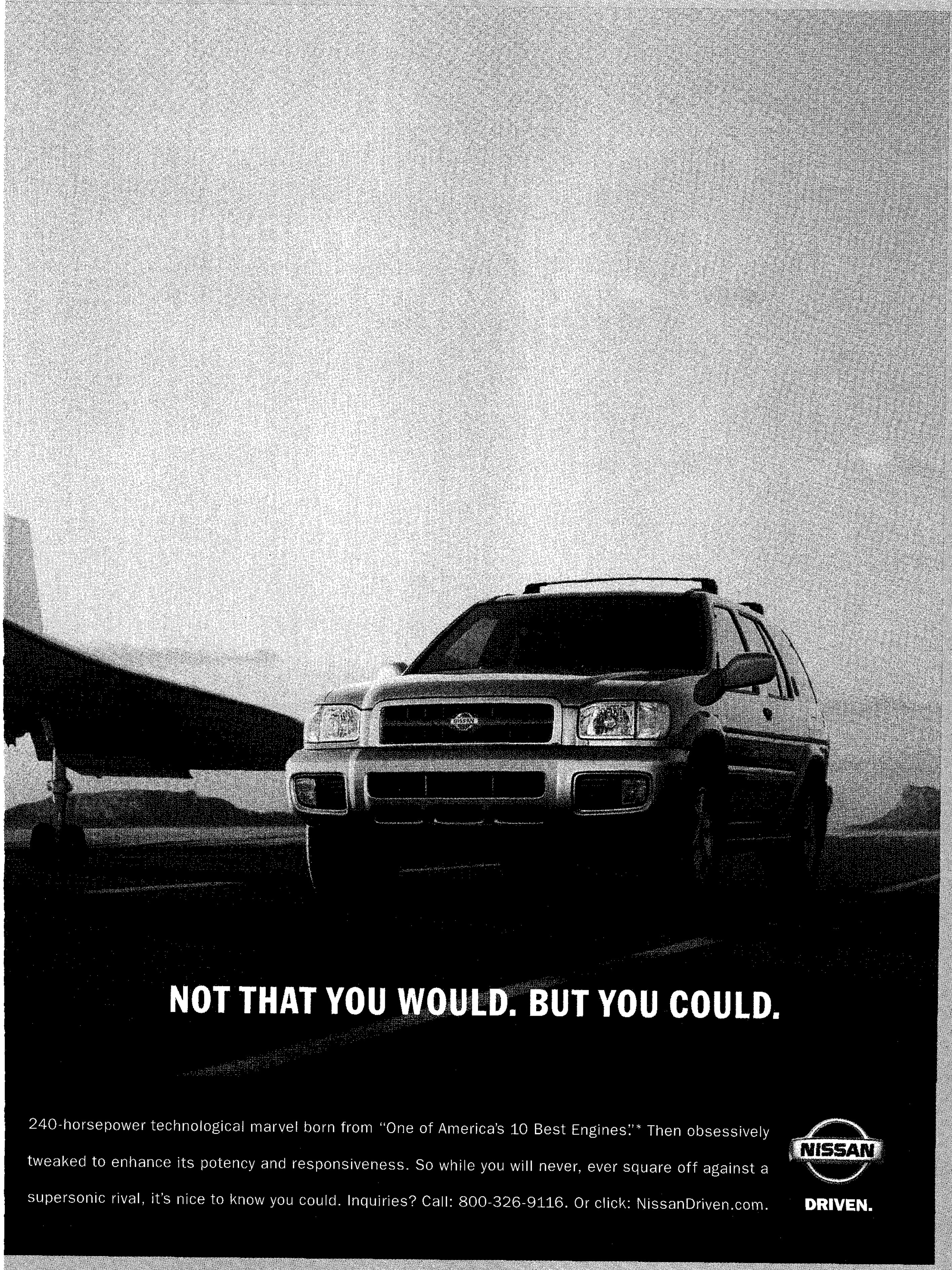

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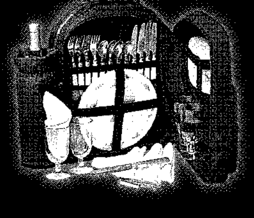

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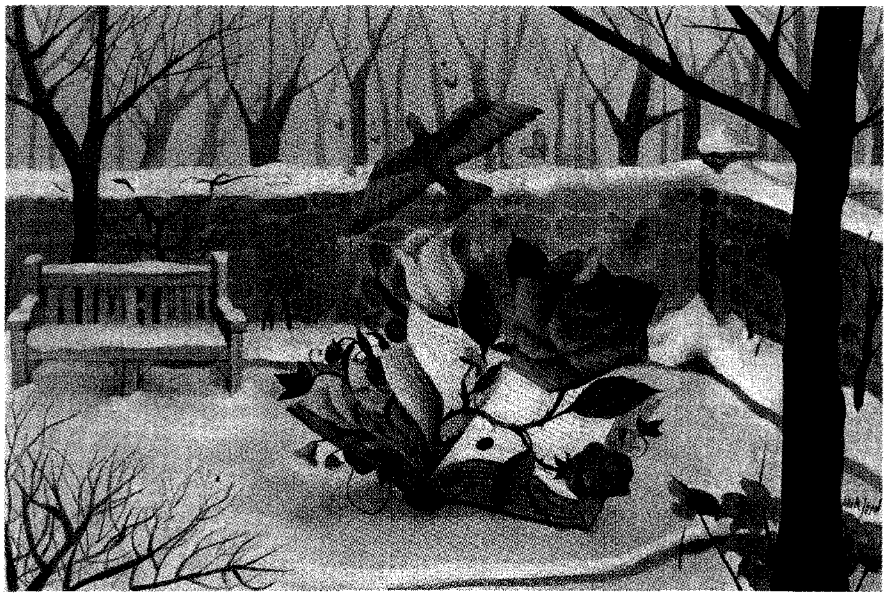
IN THE GARDEN

DAYS OF ICE AND ROSES

A winter garden, found between the pages.

BY JAMAICA KINCAID



Why should we feel betrayed because the owners of a nursery decided to sell it?

ANA JUAN

It is winter. My garden is dead. I can see it and feel it. I am in perfectly good health, but I lie in bed day after day with three hot-water bottles, under layers of sheets, blankets, and a comforter; two large glasses filled with coarsely crushed ice are on my night table, and I am surrounded by at least thirty catalogues that I have received from plantsmen and nurseries all over the United States. Looking out the window from my bed, I can see a vast stretch of the landscape, starting at the lawn and eventually sloping down into the wetlands, and from my view the wetlands seem to run rapidly across a huge emptiness that comes to a halt at the foot of a mountain, and looming over all this is the mountain itself. All that I see is covered with a thick, uninviting white substance, which has a sickeningly granulated texture that will dissolve quickly if you hold it in your palms. It covers the ground with a geological certainty, as if it were one of the many layers to make up the upper crust of the earth itself. I have lived with winter and snow for a long time, and I should be used to it and should by now even find some tiny, happy meaning to it, but I do not. Each time it arrives, I am surprised and shocked, and I feel betrayed, for how could the ground, once so soft and welcoming to my clumsy footsteps, turn so hard and unyielding to the firm stride of a boot-clad foot or the pleas of this particular gardener?

It is winter, and the garden has moved indoors, taking the form of books—directly or indirectly related to it—and catalogues offering seeds, plants, garden implements, and all sorts of things that are sometimes useful. I am looking at a copy of Wayside Gardens' spring 2001 catalogue as I say this. Many of the things listed in it were offered last spring or in last fall's edition. The big, glaring exception is a hybrid tea rose, Rosa 'Barbra Streisand,' featured on the cover and described in this way: "Ms. Streisand personally grew and selected this extraordinary lavender Hybrid Tea as her namesake. Her criteria were fragrance, color, and bloom size, and this cross of R. 'Blue Nile' and 'New Zealand' excels in all three areas." Hybrid tea roses should never be grown, for they are very ugly, especially in color (the exceptions being R. 'Pristine' and R. 'Mr. Lincoln'), but Rosa 'Barbra Streisand' is even uglier than most. Why would someone who has such a beautiful voice choose a flower that is so ugly? It is not, however, the ugliest tea rose I have ever seen. That would be R. 'Blue Girl.' Not blue at all, it is really a mauve that makes you think of a gentle mourning. Following that is one called R. 'Leonidas,' which is supposedly named after a Belgian chocolate, but this rose is not the color of chocolate; it is the color of an old rusty nail, and the moment you see it you will think, Tetanus!

The rose is one of those flowers that we cannot leave alone. It appears that everybody who has ever seen a rose loves it and then immediately sets about changing it into another rose, and this new rose is always described as better than the ones from which it came. Improving roses is irresistible, but, as it turns out, roses are quite unstable anyway. Left to themselves, they will produce something new. My beloved R. 'Stanwell Perpetual' was not brought into existence deliberately; it was found in a garden in 1838. Its parents are not known with certainty, but Martyn Rix and Roger Phillips, in their authoritative book "The Quest for the Rose," write that the rosarian Graham Thomas thinks it is a cross between *R. pimpinellifolia* and *R. damascena bifera*. The floribunda R. 'Iceberg,' which is at least three feet high and only a little less wide, is a perfectly nice rose, but not nice enough to be desired in a climbing form, yet that is just what it decided to become all by itself, and it will apparently climb up to eighteen feet. I see why roses are associated with that most unstable form of love, romantic love, for romantic love is always shifting and starting up in a new direction.

The rose, uncomplicated in fragrance and form, appears mostly in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and America. In the fall of 1998, I collected seeds of *Rosa sericea* and *R. sericea pteracantha* in Yunnan Province, in southwestern China. The sericeas are now growing in my garden, but they have not yet settled in and only produce their great beauty shyly. *R. sericea* and *R. sericea pteracantha* are spectacular in their simplicity: small, almost fernlike serrated, shiny leaves, with canes that are ruby red and translucent when new. Their flowers are white, with four petals, and they bear nice red hips. Should this not be enough? Apparently not: consulting my book "Roses," by Peter Beales, I see that there exist hybrids called R. 'Red Wing,' R. 'Heather Muir,' and R. 'Hidcote Gold,' and they have the sericeas as parents. But 'Red Wing' and 'Heather Muir' and 'Hidcote Gold' are nowhere near as beautiful as their parents.

Roses look better in pictures than they do in a vase, and they look better in a vase than they do just blooming away in the garden, and they look best in a catalogue or a book devoted only to them. I shall resist them all as they are offered in the Arena Rose Company, the Jackson & Perkins, the White Flower Farm, and the Wayside Gardens catalogues. Or, at least, I shall try. The multiflora rambler 'Bobbie James' is being offered by the Arena Rose Company. I once saw it growing beautifully in someone else's garden and have not been able to find it until now. I am going to order it immediately, but I won't tell myself that I have done so.

The Park Seed catalogue is just what it has always been, pretty, the offerings reasonably priced, but this year something else caught my eye. On the cover is a contented-looking little black girl with one hand barely able to contain a number of fat strawberries, the other holding one of the fat strawberries to her lips. This picture is highly unusual. American horticultural society is at this moment more segregated than the society of golf, and a picture of a black person cultivating plants in a leisurely way is hard to find. In the large volume of catalogues surrounding me in bed, or scattered at my feet, I will not be able to find another black person, child or adult. The Park Seed catalogue is one of the catalogues from which I order only one thing each year, and this is just so that I can remain on the mailing list and receive next year's issue. But this year, because of the little black girl, I shall order two things.

Not long ago, the owners of the Park Seed catalogue bought the Cook' s Garden, a small seed company here in Vermont, founded by the almost fanatically devoted organic gardeners Shepherd Ogden and his wife, Ellen. The Cook's Garden offered the seeds of unique vegetables and annuals that appeal to gardeners like me; that is, gardeners who will grow ordinary vegetables in unusual colors or shapes, colors or shapes not to be found in any supermarket. I found no announcement of this change of hands in the Cook's Garden catalogue the following year or anytime after; in fact, I cannot say with any certainty how I became aware of it, but when I came to read the catalogue again I could no longer participate in Shepherd's enthusiasm for the heirloom beans he had sampled the summer before in Italy, or France, or somewhere far away from me, a place where all the individual elements of living—the food, the way the sun shone, the water, the people themselves—added up to ten times more happiness than I had in my small corner of southwestern Vermont. I began to order less and less from the Cook's Garden, and more and more from Shepherd's Garden Seeds, owned by Renee Shepherd. And then one day she sold this seed company to the White Flower Farm. I tried to pay no attention to this fact, because, for one thing, even though there was no picture of her smiling as she cradled in her arms a basket brimming with vegetables (as there had been until 1996), her spirit, through the prose and the selections of seeds and annuals, seemed to be present. But starting last year the catalogue began to be printed on shiny paper, with a color-coded table of contents in the front (with different colors for different things: red for vegetables, a dull green for seed-starting supplies, a deep blue for flowers, vines, and shrubs, and so on), and it described not just seeds but also garden utensils and implements for the kitchen; worst of all, it carries a silly welcome letter from Amos Pettingill, which is really an alias for the White Flower Farm and the business that is associated with it.

It was at this point that I seriously began to think of ordering from the Henry Field's Seed and Nursery Company catalogue. This catalogue really does change from year to year but the format is always the same, and that is strangely reassuring. And yet, just to look at it, I become dizzy, as if I were in a larger than usual Wal-Mart. There are sometimes fourteen offerings of seeds listed on a page, each illustrated with a tightly cropped, dazzlingly bright color photograph, and although the photographs are often small (two by three inches), they manage to convey the impression that if you grow these vegetables your yields will be exceptionally high. It is the prose, though, the descriptions of the vegetables that will come from the seeds, that most appeals to me. Everything is described as if it were brand new to the author's eyes and palate, and this newness is articulated vigorously. The watermelon Hybrid Summer Gold is described in this way: "Crisp, sweet yellow flesh. Very early for a large melon." The pumpkin Cinderella is "Fairy tale inspired. Ornamental novelty pumpkin." I do have a criticism. When offered in pole form, the Romano bean is described as a "tasty Italian-type bean," but in bush form it's a "gourmet Italian-type." The Golden

"Daddy just got sick of money for money's sake, so here we are in Washington."

Butterwax bush bean is described as "attractive, slender pods of gourmet quality"; some shallots are a "gourmet choice for mild onion flavor"; the Fancy Red radishes are described as having a "gourmet quality and appearance"; a blend of different types of lettuce is described as a "gourmet blend of exotic shapes, textures, colors"; and the Yukon Gold potato, described in 1996 as having "striking yellow flesh . . . noted for superior taste," is currently "golden flesh, gourmet flavor." Just when did the author of the Henry Field's catalogue discover the word "gourmet," and is gourmet partaken of every day, or only once a week, like, say, Friday nights?

Nevertheless, I had just made up my mind to order only from Henry Field's when I received a catalogue for Renee Shepherd's new line of seeds, Renee's Garden. So my order to Henry Field's remained the same as always, one packet of cotton seeds, and from Renee Shepherd I ordered the *Zinnia elegans*, 'Green Envy,' described thus: "Rare and hard to find, Green Envy zinnia belongs in every flower arranger's garden. The unusual chartreuse color of this semi-double, pert-petalled zinnia sets off the brighter shades of summer bouquets. We had our Dutch growers specially select this seed strain for best form and color." Now, I do not particularly like zinnias, and I do not like green flowers at all, and green zinnias are available everywhere, but the "we had our Dutch growers specially select . . . ," etc., etc., is what will make me attach myself to a seed and nursery outlet.

Why should I feel betrayed because the original owners of the Cook's Garden and Shepherd's Garden Seeds, having had the courage to start their own little businesses, decided to make a nice profit by selling them to a larger outfit? I see that my favorite catalogue in the world, Ronninger's Seed & Potato Company, has been absorbed into something called Irish Eyes & Garden City Seeds. The old catalogue by Mr. Ronninger (I assume it is a Mr.; I do not know for sure) seemed to regard the potato as the staff of life itself, as if it were something holy, requiring a special brand of attention. (The only other products featured in the catalogue were those that would enhance the flavor of the potato, such as onions and garlic and salt; or things that

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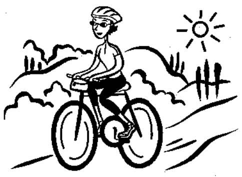

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would make the potato grow better, like alfalfa for crop rotation.) Also, the writing in the catalogue was the same every year, and every year I read it as if it were completely unfamiliar to me. Mr. Ronninger lived somewhere in Idaho I had never heard of, and perhaps he grew tired of his reverence for the potato, because one year, quite unexpectedly, the Ronninger's Seed & Potato catalogue disappeared, only to reappear inside this not at all appealing thing called Irish Eyes & Garden City Seeds. I have ordered my potatoes from there anyway, because they have more varieties than anyone, anywhere, as far as I can tell; they offer close to a hundred different kinds of potato.

My friend and travelling (seed collecting) companion Dan Hinkley recently sold his nursery and garden, Heronswood—which he and his partner, Robert Jones, made into a very successful enterprise—to the W. Atlee Burpee Company. I thought that was a very good thing, because I knew how hard they had worked to make their nursery the best in the United States, and now I could see that they might be able to enjoy their own garden the way I enjoy mine, completely, since it isn't my real job and my life depends on it only because I say so. But I suddenly grasped the undercurrent of resentment directed at them from my fellow-gardeners when I read Dan's letter to his customers in the very latest Heronswood catalogue. "Indeed," he writes, "we do not suffer this divestiture to the extent that has been prognosticated by the fumes of gossip. . . . Gardens and nurseries such as ours have always been and will continue to be ephemeral affairs, and along with their overseers, are born and mature and retire." I remember that last summer, around the time of the sale of Heronswood, a friend and fellow Heronswood customer was giving me a tour of his garden and, just as I was in a state of complete awe and admiration at the way he had incorporated a blueberry bush (which was then in fruit) into a perennial flower border, he began ranting about the sale of this beloved nursery. "But should Dan and Robert suffer," I asked, "just so we can look at the beautiful things growing in our garden and think Heronswood?" My friend did not reply, and indeed there is no reply to these sentiments in a gardener, for a gardener is such an irrational person, a happily unhappy person, a covetous person, and, perhaps most of all, a willful person.

Except, of course, if you are a Shaker gardener. My son, Harold, who is twelve years old, has been studying the Puritans (judgmental and murderous), the Quakers (generally loving and peace-and-justice-seeking), and the Shakers (almost extinct, except for museum-like villages; they are celibate) for his American-history class, and through him I came to admire the Quakers in general and to love the Shakers, if only because of their profound respect for ordinary everyday objects. One day, in a bookstore, I came across a book called "The Shaker Garden: Beauty Through Utility," by Stephanie Donaldson. If only I had had such a book before I started making my garden, how much I could have learned, how beautiful my garden would now be! The Shaker vegetable garden was divided into four large sections, each connected by stone or wooden pathways. The little packet in which the seeds I'm ordering will come was invented by the Shakers. Their catalogue of seed offerings in the eighteen-seventies read: "The following seeds are selected with peculiar care, being the choicest kinds of the different varieties; and as such they will recommend themselves. They will be sold on the most reasonable terms by the pound, or put up in small papers for retailing, to suit the convenience of the customer."

Looking out into my snowbound vegetable garden, I see the two very expensive spades I forgot to bring in last autumn, and I read what the Shakers said about tools: "No one should take tools, belonging in charge of others, without obtaining liberty for the same. When anyone borrows a tool, it should be immediately returned, without injury, if possible, and if injured, should be made known by the borrower to the lender." At first, the Shakers grew only flowers that had medicinal or otherwise useful properties, but eventually the old garden story of temptation and the giving in to it caught up with them, and they began to grow flowers just for their beauty. How I love the Shakers when looking through this book, and when I have closed it I know how much I would have hated actually being a Shaker, for everything is always much better and more bearable between the covers of a book.

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUNDS, 1946

I have had the honor of being imprisoned, the
joy of breaking stone with a sledgehammer, the
pleasure of sleeping under a bare light bulb, the
grief of shitting with a guard watching, the
sorrow of eating by myself, and I have
felt the lightness of being released and watched the
leaves change color from a speeding car,
and I first read the Gospels then, a stiff
and swollen paperback, the way paper
was made then, and I slept peacefully,
a blanket over the steel, as I recall,
though I planned the same murder every night,
which kept me going my thirteen working hours;
and when I got home I threw my duffelbag into
the river and walked to the No. 69 streetcar,
and even the clothes I wore, even the shoes,
even the overcoat, I stuffed into
the hot incinerator, and listened to the roar
three stories down and watched the particles float
inside the chute and read an old newspaper
on top of the bundle and tested the cord and cleaned
the greasy window, since I was cleaning everything.

—*Gerald Stern*

One day, there was so much snow on the ground that I was suddenly caught up in the irrational fear that it would pile up and eventually enter the house, filling up every corner and devouring me in the process. I calmed myself down with many things, including reading the myth of Vertumnus, the god of the changing seasons, who fell in love with the beautiful wood nymph and gardener Pomona. Many gods fell in love with her, but Vertumnus loved her best, and, as you would expect, she didn't love any of them. Vertumnus tried all sorts of things to get her to fall in love with him: he disguised himself as a reaper and brought her corn; he appeared with a ladder and pretended he was someone who picked apples; he pretended he was a soldier. None of this worked. Then he decided to disguise himself as an old woman, and, speaking in the old woman's voice, he told Pomona how beautiful she was, and how deserving of her many suitors, but that none of them loved her more than Vertumnus, who was young and handsome, who loved gardening, and who would do anything Pomona wanted. She remained unmoved, and the disguised Vertumnus told her the tale of Iphis, who loved Anaxarete. When Iphis declared his love, Anaxarete laughed at him and said many cruel things. In complete despair, Iphis placed a rope around his neck and hanged himself from her gatepost, the very gatepost on which he used to hang garlands of flowers for her. His funeral procession happened to pass by the house where Anaxarete lived, and when she saw that it was Iphis who was dead she was so stunned that all the blood in her body became cold and she could not move. She had become as stony as her heart had been to Iphis. After Vertumnus told Pomona this story, he dropped his disguise and appeared to her as himself, "like the sun bursting through a cloud," according to Bulfinch. "He would have renewed his entreaties, but there was no need; his arguments and the sight of his true form prevailed, and the Nymph no longer resisted, but owned a mutual flame."

Spring will come to this gardener's world, not disguised as something else but as its true self, youthful shoots of green, endless waves of a delicate warmth, and I will welcome it with such joy, as if I had never welcomed it before. ♦

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ANNALS OF WAR

NEIGHBORS

One day in 1941, half the population of a small town in Poland murdered the other half. Why?

BY JAN T. GROSS

In January of 1949, security police detained fifteen men in the town of Jedwabne, in northeastern Poland. Among the men arrested—mostly small farmers and seasonal workers—there were two shoemakers, a mason, a carpenter, two locksmiths, a letter carrier, and a former town-hall receptionist. Some were family men (one was a father of six children, another of four), some still unattached. The youngest was twenty-seven, the oldest fifty-nine. They were, to all appearances, a group of ordinary men.

Other arrests followed, and four months later, on May 16th and 17th, in the District Court of Lomza, a town a dozen miles away, twenty-two men from Jedwabne, including the former town-hall receptionist, Boleslaw Ramotowski, were tried on charges of "assisting authorities of the German state by participating in the capture of some 1,200 people of Jewish nationality who were all burned by the Germans in a barn belonging to Bronislaw Szleszynski." In 1953, a Jedwabne shop owner named Jozef Sobuta was tried on similar charges. The trials were prompted by a deposition describing the history of the town under German occupation, which was given to the Jewish Historical Commission, an organization that had begun collecting information at the war's end. Szmul Wasersztejn, the son of a Jedwabne butcher, had been deposed on April 5, 1945, and this is what he said:

> Before the war broke out, 1,600 Jews lived in Jedwabne, and only seven survived, saved by a Polish woman, Wyrzykowska, who lived in the vicinity. . . .
>
> On June 23, 1941, Germans entered the town. And as early as the 25th local bandits, from the Polish population, started an anti-Jewish pogrom. Two of those bandits, Wacek Borowski with his brother Mietek, walked from one Jewish dwelling to another together with other bandits playing accordion and flute to drown the screams of Jewish women and children. I saw with my own eyes how those murderers killed Chajcia Wasersztejn, fifty-three years old, Jakub Kac, seventy-three years old, and Eliasz Krawiecki.
>
> Jakub Kac they stoned to death with bricks. Krawiecki they knifed and then plucked his eyes and cut off his tongue. He suffered terribly for twelve hours before he gave up his soul.
>
> On the same day I observed a horrible scene. Chaja Kubrzanska, twenty-eight years old, and Basia Binsztejn, twenty-six years old, both holding newborn babies, when they saw what was going on, they ran to a pond, in order to drown themselves with the children rather than fall into the hands of bandits. They put their children in the water and drowned them with their own hands: then Baska Binsztejn jumped in and immediately went to the bottom, while Chaja Kubrzanska suffered for a couple of hours. Assembled hooligans made a spectacle of this. They advised her to lie face down in the water, so that she would drown faster. Finally, seeing that the children were already dead, she threw herself more energetically into the water and found her death, too.
>
> The next day a local priest intervened, explaining that they should stop the pogrom, and that German authorities would take care of things by themselves. This worked, and the pogrom was stopped. From this day on the local population no longer sold foodstuffs to Jews, which made their circumstances all the more difficult. In the meantime rumors spread that the Germans would issue an order that all the Jews be destroyed.
>
> Such an order was issued by the Germans on July 10, 1941. Even though the Germans gave the order, it was Polish hooligans who took it up and carried it out, using the most horrible methods. After various tortures and humiliations, they burned all the Jews in a barn.

Despite Wasersztejn's account, the notion that Germans, rather than Poles, had carried out the Jedwabne massacre went unchallenged in Poland for more than fifty years. The vast majority of Poles believe that throughout the Second World War they were victims—and only victims—of their German and Soviet occupiers. Roughly three million Poles and three million Polish Jews died in the war. Although Jews made up ten per cent of the country's population, most historians have treated their destruction as somehow unrelated to the Polish people. Evidence, however, shows that in Jedwabne's case the conventional historiography had failed to come to terms with what actually happened.

The first account reporting the massacre in Jedwabne was Szmul Wasersztejn's 1945 deposition. Then, in 1980, a Memorial Book of Jedwabne Jews was assembled by Rabbis Jacob and Julius Baker, consisting of accounts of Jewish life in the town. In it, several eyewitnesses described the events surrounding the massacre. In 1998, the filmmaker Agnieszka Arnold interviewed several Jedwabne inhabitants for a documentary called "Where Is My Older Brother Cain?" And, later still, I had an opportunity to talk about these events with several former residents, including Szmul Wasersztejn.

Much of the evidence comes not from Jewish survivors but from testimony in the 1949 and 1953 trials. In the 1949 trial, twelve of the twenty-two defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from eight to fifteen years, and one man, Karol Bardon, was sentenced to death. (The sentence was never carried out.) In the Lomza courtroom, several defendants revealed that they had been beaten during interrogation. Beatings appear to have been standard interrogation procedure at that time, however, and the investigation, most of which was completed in two weeks, and the trial, which was completed in two days, appear to have been perfunctory. Most of the defendants were deposed only once and were asked, more or less, three questions: Where did you live in July, 1941? Did you participate in the murder of Jews in the month of July? Who else participated in rounding up and murdering the Jews of Jedwabne? This was

"They chased them all to a barn. Poured kerosene all around. It took but two minutes, but the scream . . . I can still hear it."

RAINER FETTING, "SHINING" (1983) ©2001 ARS, NY/VG BILD-KUNST, BONN

not, I concluded, a political trial, and the evidence it produced can be relied upon.

I—A QUIET TOWN

Jedwabne is situated near the intersection of two rivers, the Narew and the Biebrza, some ninety miles from Warsaw. The rivers overflow each spring, and the area is famous for picturesque wetlands, several varieties of waterfowl, and lush vegetation; in 1993, the country's largest national park was established there. But the town itself is ugly. The houses were traditionally built of wood and straw, the cheapest and most readily available construction materials in this part of the country, and fires were frequent. In an account for the Jedwabne Memorial Book, one Jew recalled how in the evenings, before going to sleep, villagers might cast a last glance toward the north, where, just beyond the horizon, lay the neighboring town of Radzilow. And if the night sky showed a faint pink glow they would quickly load wagons with supplies and rush to the rescue. Similarly, Radzilow kept an eye on Jedwabne.

Jedwabne received its town charter in 1736, though it had already been settled for three hundred years. By 1770, three hundred and eighty-seven Jews lived there, a substantial majority of the total population of four hundred and fifty. According to 1931 census figures, the town population then totalled twenty-one hundred and sixty-seven. More than sixty per cent of Jedwabne's inhabitants identified themselves as Jews.

MARISA ACOCELLA

"They stay together for the money."

• •

Jewish communities in the area had various nicknames for one another. Jews from Radzilow, for example, were called *Radzhilover kozes*, or Radzilow goats, an amiable and slightly mocking label; Jews from Lomza, a much larger town, were nicknamed *Lomzher balonim*, or choosy, smug, and somewhat sybaritic; Jews from Kolno, a town to the northwest, were known as *Kolner pekelakh*, meaning that they carried loads, or burdens, and tended to complain a lot; and Jews from Jedwabne were called *Yedvabner krikhers* ("crawlers"), presumably because they were known to move around slowly and methodically.

Rabbi Jacob Baker, who is now eighty-six and lives in Brooklyn, has fond memories of prewar encounters with Polish neighbors. He lived in Jedwabne with his mother, his grandparents, his brother Julius, and another brother, not far from a compound occupied by a family of Poles, the Sielawas. Like many other people from the neighborhood, he and his siblings would occasionally go to the Sielawa well to draw water, because it was reputed to be excellent. He recalled, "One winter nightfall I observed neighbor Sielawa's little girl deliver to Reizele"—Baker's grandmother—"a small amount of potato peel for her cow, for which she immediately reimbursed her with a whole gallon of milk. When I wondered at the unequal exchange, Reizele explained it thus: 'From the small amount of potato peel we may deduce how little food that family had for supper.' " An elderly Polish pharmacist from Jedwabne, interviewed a few years ago by Agnieszka Arnold, also recalled good neighborly relations between Poles and Jews: "Here there were no such big differences in opinion or whatever, because they"—the Jews—"were, in this little town, on good terms with the Poles. Depending on each other. Everybody was on a first-name basis, Janek, Icek . . . Life here was, I would say, somehow idyllic."

There was plenty of interaction among the neighbors. And if there was an undercurrent of prudence and caution—Jews were always aware of a latent hostility in the surrounding population, especially since Poles throughout the area tended to support the anti-Semitic nationalist parties—open confrontation seems to have been avoided during the interwar years.

Of course, there were times when Jews were particularly vulnerable to outbursts of anti-Semitism. In the distant past, when the local gentry periodically convened the territorial assembly, bringing together large retinues of servants and acolytes, there had often been drunken brawls, during which local Jews were beaten. At Easter, priests evoked in their sermons an image of Jews as God-killers, making the season a perennial occasion for anti-Semitic violence. In such an atmosphere, a mere coincidence could be unfortunate. Jona Rothchild, a Jedwabne hardware-store owner, writes in the Memorial Book that in 1934 a Jewish woman was killed in Jedwabne, and a few days later a craftsman in a neighboring town was shot to death at a fair. A rumor began to circulate that the Jedwabne Jews had thus taken revenge on the Poles. The threat of a pogrom (which people had begun to dread) was averted after the spiritual leader of the Jewish community, Rabbi Avigdor Bialostocki, and Rothchild himself visited the Jedwabne priest.

Jews took it as a matter of course that at times when there was a threat of anti-Semitism both secular and religious authorities had to be appeased with gifts. They were prepared to pay for protection, and for centuries the *kehiles*, the Jewish communal authorities, had maintained special funds designated for this purpose.

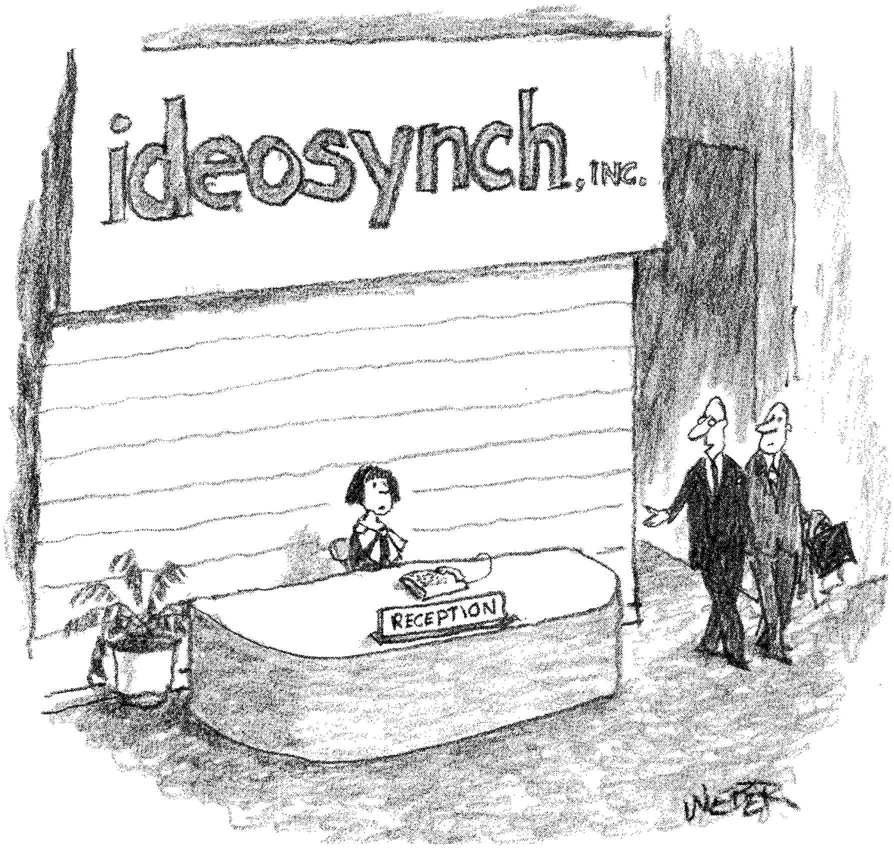
II—RUSSIANS AND GERMANS

On August 23, 1939, the German-Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression was signed in Moscow, opening the way for Hitler to launch a military invasion of Poland without the risk of the Soviet Union's creating a second front against him, in the east. As a result of the pact's secret protocols, more than half the territory of Poland was occupied in the autumn of 1939 by Soviet forces, after the Red Army marched across the Polish eastern border, on September 17th. Hitler had invaded Poland on September 1st. Initially, there was confusion about the boundaries between the two occupation zones, and that autumn Jedwabne was briefly occupied by the Wehrmacht before being turned over to the Soviet authorities. The Soviet occupation lasted until Hitler's surprise invasion of the Soviet Union, in June of 1941.

Conventional wisdom has it that at first the Jews collaborated with the Soviets, at the expense of the Poles, and that if brutal outbursts of anti-Semitism did take place in 1941, when the Germans occupied the area, they were in part understandable. It is undoubtedly true that Jews, who made up more than half the population of Jedwabne, took jobs with the new administration, in the militia, or in state-run commerce and manufacturing coöperatives established by the Soviet authorities. The Soviets were used to manipulating ethnic antagonisms to maintain control over the local population. However, positions at the top level of the local administration were entrusted to experienced personnel from the Soviet Union, rather than to local people.

Nevertheless, residents of the Polish territories occupied by the Soviets in 1939 often portrayed the Jews as having a privileged relationship with the occupiers. In many accounts, Polish witnesses have described their towns' first encounters with the Red Army as being accompanied by spontaneous outbursts of joy and celebrations by the Jewish population, which, they go on to say, eagerly enlisted in the new administration. When Agnieszka Arnold interviewed the daughter of the barn owner Bronislaw Szleszynski—a source who certainly would not whitewash Jewish behavior toward the Soviet Army—she had this to say:

> I saw how the Soviets came in, you know. They went down Przystrzelska Street. Here there was a bakery and a Jew and a Jewess put out a table, it was covered with red cloth, you know, this red cloth was on it, and a Polish family. Two Polish families, because these were Communists from before the war. . . . And so these three families greeted Soviet soldiers with bread and salt. This I saw. A large banner was attached from one building to another: "We welcome you" in big white capital letters, they were white, capital letters. And so they greeted them with their wives. And then the army at the square, where there is a park now, spread around. I was sixteen years old then, and there were also children. Just children, because older people did not



"This is Ms. Watkins, a vital member of our greet staff."

> come out to look at this, they were afraid, only from afar, but children have to be everywhere. Well, I was not such a young child, but we went down there.

In yet another conversation recorded by Arnold, the local pharmacist, an elderly Pole, attempted to explain the nature of the alleged collaboration between the Jews and the Soviet administration: "You know, I don't know any proof of this. I only repeat what was, so to speak, a well-known secret. This is what people said. Well, someone had to do it. But I cannot guarantee this with my . . . No, I didn't see anyone do it. I didn't personally know." In other words, the stereotype of the Jews' sycophantic attitude toward the Soviets could be "confirmed" by a group of Jewish children cheerfully marching down the street, or by the fact that a Jew worked in the post office or some other official institution, or that a Jewish youth spoke arrogantly to a passerby on the street or to a fellow-customer waiting in line in a store. Undoubtedly, there were "collaborators" or Soviet secret-police agents among the Jews, but not among the Jews exclusively. In the Jedwabne area, a Polish underground organization was betrayed to the Soviets by one of its members, a Pole.

Twenty-one months of Soviet occupation of the area took a heavy toll on residents. A process of Sovietization affected people of all religions, ethnic groups, and social classes, but the brunt of propaganda and repression was directed against the Polish state. Local élites were arrested or deported. Private property was gradually taken over by the Soviet authorities. A vigorous campaign of secularization targeted all religious institutions and personnel. Consequently, with the exception of the Jews (who feared the Nazis more than they feared the Bolsheviks), in the summer of 1941 the population welcomed the invading German Army.

The German attack on the Soviet Union began on June 22, 1941. As soon as the Germans entered Jedwabne, Czeslaw Kupiecki, a local Communist who worked in the Soviet militia, was denounced, as were many other Communist sympathizers throughout the area. And even though it is not clear who, specifically, was responsible for identifying Kupiecki, it appears that, from the beginning of the occupation, local people were helping the Germans identify Communists and others they considered enemies and terrorize them. Thus, Karol Bardon, who was sentenced to death in the 1949 trial, saw, in the main square in Jedwabne, a group of people covered with blood and standing

> with their hands up, first Kupiecki, former volunteer of the Soviet militia and inhabitant of the town of Jedwabne, then Wisniewski, former chairman of the village soviet, third Wisniewski, secretary of the soviet—these were brothers from the hamlet of Bartki in Jedwabne *gmina* some ten kilometres from Jedwabne—then three people of Mosaic faith, one of them the owner of the bakery in Jedwabne at the corner of the square and Przystrzelska Street. Two others I didn't recognize. These six bleeding individuals were encircled by Germans. In front of the Germans stood a few civilians with thick clubs, to whom a German was yelling, "Do not kill at once. Slowly, let them suffer." The hands of the beaten were falling. Those civilians doing the beating I didn't recognize, because they were encircled by a group of Germans.

It was Szmul Wasersztejn's deposition—followed by testimony from other witnesses—that first drew attention to what happened in Jedwabne in the days after the Germans arrived. Some people were killed, but the principal threats to Jews were beatings, confiscation of property, and humiliation—men walking down the street would be ordered to clean outhouses with their bare hands, for example.

We know from accounts in the Memorial Book that among the Jews fear was intensifying, primarily because of rumors about pogroms and killings being carried out in the immediate vicinity. A young Jew from Radzilow, Menachem Finkielsztejn, reports that in the days preceding the Jedwabne massacre several hundred Jews were killed in Radzilow. And on July 5th, in nearby Wasosz, another massacre occurred. Describing the murder of the Radzilow Jews, Finkielsztejn wrote:

> What a terrible sight this presented can be gauged from the fact that the Germans stated that the Poles had gone overboard. The arrival of the Germans saved eighteen Jews who had managed to hide during the pogrom. There was an eight-year-old boy among them, who had already been buried, but who revived and dug himself out. . . .
>
> *In this manner the Jewish community in* Radzilow was wiped off the face of the earth after five hundred years of existence. Together with the Jews everything Jewish was destroyed in the village as well: the study house, the synagogue, and the cemetery.

Finkielsztejn's narrative found unexpected confirmation sixty years later. Last year, in an article in the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, an elderly Polish man who wished to remain anonymous spoke about the Radzilow pogrom: "Neither on this day nor on the preceding day did I see any Germans coming from the outside to Radzilow. A gendarme stood on the balcony and looked at the scene. But our people did it. In fact on the previous day, on Sunday, July 6th, a lot of people came to Radzilow by horse-drawn carts from Wasosz, where a pogrom had taken place a day earlier."

As a result of those pogroms, many Jews from the surrounding villages sought shelter in Jedwabne. Among them was a sixteen-year-old named Wiktor Nielawicki. He was a nephew of the Pecynowicz family, well-to-do millers in Jedwabne. Nielawicki was from Wizna, where the Germans, immediately upon entering the town, executed scores of Jewish males. But, since the Wizna Jews looked very much like their Polish neighbors, German executioners needed help from local Polish informants to identify them. In this manner, some seventy Jewish males were picked up from a few houses still standing after the German bombardment—near the town square—and were taken and shot in a nearby ditch. At a smith's house at Srebrowska Street, where several Jewish families had sought shelter, another seventy-five were killed on the spot.

Nielawicki and his parents found temporary shelter at the house of his uncle. "In Jedwabne it was still quiet," Nielawicki writes in the Jedwabne Memorial Book. But people knew what was coming. Both Dvojra Pecynowicz, Nielawicki's cousin, and Mietek Olszewicz, who survived the war in hiding with Wasersztejn, were warned by Polish friends of an impending catastrophe. When Nielawicki urged his relatives to take note of these "constant warnings that came from friendly Gentile neighbors" and hide, they were dismissive, pointing out that Jews had lived in Warsaw under the German occupation for two years already. "My uncle and his

"JEDWABNE MEMORIAL BOOK"/COURTESY PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Szmul Wasersztejn (center), shortly after the war. He was saved by Antonina Wyrzykowska (seated, left), who hid him.

rich brother Eliyahu did not believe me when I told them what had happened in Wizna," Nielawicki writes. " 'And if it had happened there,' they said, 'we here in Jedwabne are safe because the Bishop promised to protect us.' "

In the meantime, Jedwabne's Poles formed a new municipal government. Marian Karolak, whose family had a business in the main square, became the mayor, and among his closest collaborators a certain Wasilewski and the shop owner Jozef Sobuta can be identified. It is not clear what municipal authorities were doing during those days, beyond consulting with the Germans.

Here is Szmul Wasersztejn's account:

> On the morning of July 10, 1941, eight Gestapo men came to town and had a meeting with representatives of the town authorities. When the Gestapo asked what their plans were with respect to the Jews, they said, unanimously, that all Jews must be killed. When the Germans proposed to leave one Jewish family from each profession, the local carpenter Bronislaw Szleszynski, who was present, answered: We have enough of our own craftsmen, we have to destroy all the Jews, none should stay alive. Mayor Karolak and everybody else agreed with his words. For this purpose Szleszynski gave his own barn, which stood nearby. After this meeting the bloodbath began.
>
> Local hooligans armed themselves with axes, special clubs studded with nails, and other instruments of torture and destruction and chased all the Jews into the street. As the

> first victims of their devilish instincts they selected seventy-five of the youngest and healthiest Jews, whom they ordered to pick up a huge monument of Lenin that the Russians had erected in the center of town. It was impossibly heavy, but under a rain of horrible blows the Jews had to do it. While carrying the monument, they also had to sing until they brought it to the designated place. There they were ordered to dig a hole and throw the monument in. Then these Jews were butchered to death and thrown into the same hole.
>
> The other brutality was when the murderers ordered every Jew to dig a hole and bury all previously murdered Jews, and then those were killed and in turn buried by others. It is impossible to represent all the brutalities of the hooligans, and it is difficult to find in our history of suffering something similar.

The massacre was coördinated by Marian Karolak. His name appears in virtually every deposition. (He left the area after the war and was apparently never brought to justice.) A few other people identified in leading roles that day were also employed by the town council. A road watchman, Mieczyslaw Gerwad, put it simply: "The entire town council participated in this murder of Jews."

It cannot be determined whether the initiative originated with the Germans or with the town council alone. But both sides apparently quickly agreed on the matter, and on the method of its implementation. Jerzy Laudanski, one of the youngest—he was not yet nineteen—and most brutal participants, testified:

> At the instruction of my brother Zygmunt Laudanski I went to work for the gendarmerie in Jedwabne, and in 1941 four or five Gestapo men came in a taxi and started talking in the city hall; what they talked about I don't know. After a certain time Marian Karolak told us Poles to call Polish citizens to the town hall. After calling in the Polish population, he ordered them to round up the Jews in the square, presumably to work, and this was done. At that time I also participated in herding the Jews onto the square.

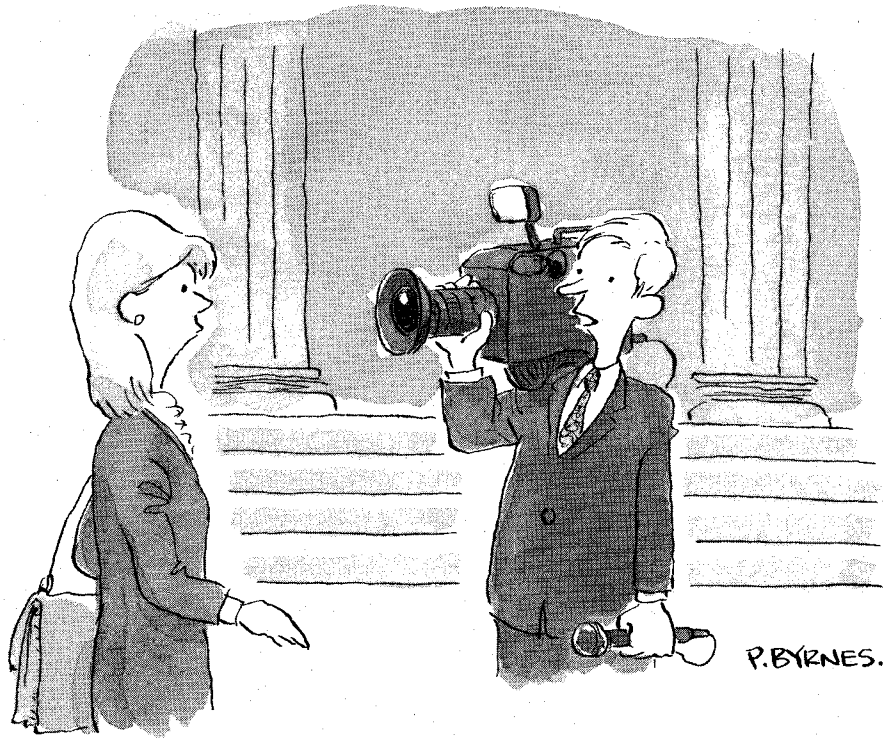
The visit of the Gestapo men to Jedwabne is confirmed by many sources. But they do not agree on details—did the Gestapo arrive on the day of the pogrom, for example, or the day before? "Before the start of this mass murder," Karol Bardon, who, soon after, began working for the German gendarmerie, writes, "I saw in front of the Jedwabne town hall a few Gestapo men, but I don't remember if it was on the day of the mass murder or the day before." A witness named Henryk Krystowczyk said that the town council signed some "agreement with the Gestapo" about the burning of the Jews. But he did not participate in the meeting and only repeats what he has heard "from various people." The only town-council member who left a deposition is Jozef Sobuta; after the war, he pretended to be out of his mind, and his testimony is less than forthcoming.

Estimates of the precise number of Germans in Jedwabne on the day of the massacre vary, but most witnesses agree that the gendarmerie was staffed by fewer than a dozen men. In all likelihood, the municipal authorities were given a certain amount of time—eight hours, if we are to take literally an angry reprimand by the gendarmerie commander—to get rid of the Jews as they pleased.

According to Jozef Zyluk, one of the 1949 defendants, "It was like this: I was cutting hay, and the mayor of Jedwabne, Karolak, came to me in the meadow and said to go and bring all the Jews into the square. And so we both went."

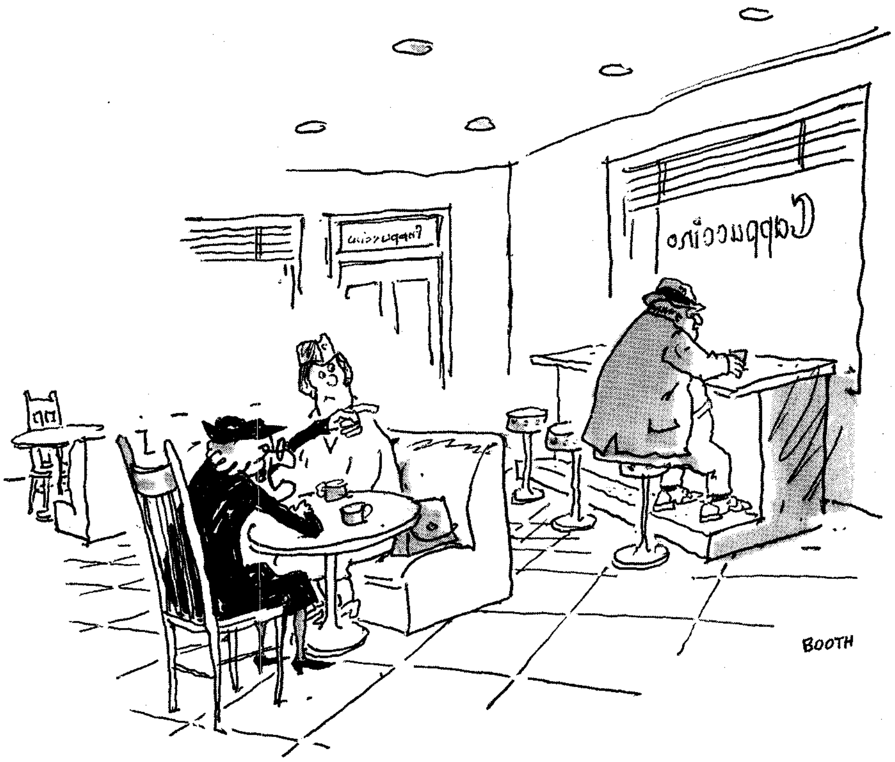
The term "gendarmes" is often used to explain the circumstances that led several of the accused in the trials to appear in the market square or near the barn. Thus, in a typical deposition, Czeslaw Lipinski, a farmer, tells the court that Jerzy Laudanski, Eugeniusz Kalinowski, "and one German" came to get him, and that he went with them to round up Jews and bring them to the square. Feliks Tarnacki was visited by Karolak and Wasilewski, who "together with a Gestapo man chased me to the square," where the Jews were gathered. Wladyslaw Miciura, who was doing some carpentry work in town, was told by a gendarme at some point "to go to the square to watch the Jews." This is the only testimony that has a lone gendarme ordering anyone into action. In all other testimony, the gendarme made the rounds in the company of members of the town council.

It should not be forgotten that the over-all, undisputed rulers over matters of life and death in Jedwabne were the Germans. No sustained organized activity could take place without their consent. They were the only ones who could decide the fate of the Jews. It would have been within their power to stop the pogrom at any time. They did not choose to intervene. If they suggested that some Jewish families be spared, they must have done so without serious conviction, for virtually all the Jews on whom the murderers laid their hands were killed in the end. It is clear that had Jedwabne



"Actually, I work for a newspaper, but people won't talk to me without it."

not been occupied by the Germans, the Jews would not have been murdered by their neighbors.



"See that man sitting right over there? He gives me fever."

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In 1949, Edward Szleszynski testified, "In the barn of my father, Bronislaw Szleszynski, a lot of Jews were burned. I didn't see it with my own eyes since I was in the bakery on that day, but I know from people who lived in Jedwabne at the time that Poles carried out this deed. Germans participated only in photographing." The defendant Boleslaw Ramotowski testified, "I want to stress that Germans did not participate in the murder of Jews; they just stood and took pictures of how Poles mistreated the Jews." Mieczyslaw Gerwad: "Jews were being murdered by the Polish population."

Julia Sokolowska worked as a cook for the gendarmes, and was at the German outpost during the day of the massacre. When she was questioned during the 1949 investigation, she gave the following testimony:

> A few days after the German occupying army entered Polish territory in 1941, inhabitants of Jedwabne, together with the Germans, started to kill Jews living in the town of Jedwabne, where they killed over fifteen hundred people of Jewish nationality. I stress that I did not see any Germans beating the Jews. The Germans even brought three Jewish women to the gendarmerie outpost and said to make sure that they didn't get killed, so I locked them up and gave the key to the gendarme who had told me to lock them up, and he ordered me to give them something to eat, so I prepared something and I brought it to them. When everything was over and things calmed down, these Jewish women were let go, and they lived in a house near the gendarmerie and came to work at the gendarmerie outpost. Germans did not beat the Jews; the Polish population bestially massacred the Jews, and Germans only stood to the side and took pictures, and later they showed how Poles killed the Jews.

Sokolowska then proceeded to enumerate fifteen individuals or families (fathers and sons, for instance, or brothers) who she says took an active part in the massacre. She notes who beat the Jews with a wooden club, and who used a rubber truncheon, and adds one more interesting detail: "I saw how Eugeniusz Kalinowski approached the commander of the gendarmes asking that he issue him weapons because 'they' didn't want to go—he didn't say who didn't want to go. The commander jumped to his feet and said, I will not give you weapons; do what you want. Then [Kalinowski] turned around and quickly ran outside the town where they were chasing these Jews."

Sokolowska later modified some of this testimony, claiming that there were sixty Gestapo men and many gendarmes in town that day, but her number was directly challenged by Karol Bardon after the war:

> After the killing of Jews was carried out, a few civilians ran into the courtyard of the gendarmerie outpost where I was repairing a car and tried to grab three Jews who were chopping wood. Then the commander of the outpost, Adamy, came out and said, Was eight hours not enough for you to do with the Jews as you please? From the above it is clear that the mass murder of the Jews was not carried out by the Gestapo, whom I did not see that day, but by the local population under the leadership of Mayor Karolak.

Bardon went back to this episode three years later, in an autobiography that he sent to the President of the Polish People's Republic as an attachment to an appeal for clemency. He ended his autobiography with the following sentence: "During this day of mass murder I walked three times to the toolshed, some 350-400 metres away, and in the streets to dinner and back, and I did not see a single uniformed individual either in the streets or by the group of people assembled in the square." It seems unlikely that a convict pleading for mercy would write such things in support of his clemency appeal to endear himself to the President of Poland, who would presumably rather hear news confirming that the Germans, rather than his fellow-citizens, had murdered the Jews. And, indeed, the available sources cite, by my count, ninety-two names (and, often, home addresses as well) of Jedwabne Poles who participated in the murders of the Jews. Perhaps not all of them should be labelled murderers—after all, ten of the accused in the 1949 trials were found not guilty. People who guarded the Jews in the square may not have been involved in acts of murder. On the other hand, it is clear that the people mentioned by name are not the only ones who participated. "Near the assembled Jews, there was a mass of people not only from Jedwabne but also from the environs," Miciura states. The crowd of perpetrators somehow grew as Jews were being herded toward the

SABA

SHOWCASE BY
MARTIN SCHOELLER

MEXICAN RADIO

As a child in Tijuana, Julieta Venegas picked up alternative-rock stations from Southern California, and she soon found herself seduced by English-language artists ranging from Lou Reed to Depeche Mode. On last year's "Bueninvento," Venegas returned the favor. With contributions from the best alternative-rock sidemen in both the United States and Mexico, the record, Venegas's second solo album, is a superb collection of infectious, angular compositions that recall introspective singer-songwriters such as Suzanne Vega and spikier artists such as Fiona Apple and Björk. Venegas favors quirky arrangements—her songs are enlivened by junk-yard percussion, bursts of guitar, and mournful strains of accordion—and her lyrics, even untranslated, suggest the application of an analytical mind to the labyrinth of romance.

As a result of "Bueninvento," the thirty-year-old Venegas has become one of the brightest lights of Mexican rock. At the moment, she is preparing for an American mini-tour to promote "Escena Alterlatina," a collection of songs by Latin rock and hip-hop acts which includes a swirling new Venegas composition, "Me Van a Matar." (The tour visits Los Angeles and San Francisco before concluding at the Mercury Lounge in New York City, on April 3rd.) And she's still listening to American music. "People think that the accordion in my music comes from Mexican folk music, from *norteña*," she says. "But one of the main reasons I started using it was because of Joe Jackson—I saw a video of a concert where he played accordion, and it seemed cool to me."

—*Ben Greenman*

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barn. Boleslaw Ramotowski says, "When we were chasing them to the barn, I couldn't see, because it was very crowded."

The men on trial had all lived in Jedwabne, and could not identify many of the other participants, because a large number of them were peasants who came into town from neighboring hamlets. "There were many peasants from hamlets whom I didn't know," Miciura explained. "These were for the most part young men who enjoyed this catching of the Jews, and they tortured them."

The ninety-two participants singled out by name were all adult men, residents of Jedwabne. Before the war, some twenty-five hundred people lived in the town, with Jews making up about two-thirds of the total. Dividing the ethnic-Polish population in half, one gets about four hundred and fifty male Polish residents, including children and the elderly. Dividing this number in half again, one might conclude that roughly fifty per cent of the adult men of Jedwabne are identified by name as being among the participants in the pogrom.

III—THE FIRE

On the morning of July 10, 1941, adult Polish males were summoned to the Jedwabne town hall. Carts full of people from nearby villages had been converging on the town since early dawn. I suspect that some of these people were veterans of other pogroms that had recently been carried out in the vicinity, for, when "waves of pogroms" swept through areas, men would often move from place to place, joining in with the local participants.

According to a trial witness named Stanislaw Danowski, "On a certain day, at the request of Karolak and Sobuta, several dozen men assembled in front of the town hall in Jedwabne and were equipped by the German gendarmerie and Karolak and Sobuta with whips and clubs. Then Karolak and Sobuta ordered the assembled men to bring to the square in front of the town hall all the Jews of Jedwabne."

More or less at the same time that Poles were called to the town hall, the Jews were ordered to assemble in the square, allegedly for some cleaning duty. A young mother from Jedwabne named Rivka Fogel, writing in the Memorial Book, recalled that they were told to

"We've got to talk—let's go to a movie."

bring brooms. Since Jews had previously been pressed into debasing cleanup jobs, one could imagine at first that this was to be merely a routine exercise in humiliation. "My husband took our two children and went there," Rivka Fogel wrote. "I stayed at home for a while trying to put things in order and lock the windows and doors properly." It soon became clear that the circumstances were different. Mrs. Fogel did not follow her husband and children to the square; instead, she and a neighbor, Mrs. Pravde, hid nearby in the garden of a nobleman's estate. A few moments later, "We could hear from there the terrible cries of a young boy, Joseph Lewin, whom the goyim were beating to death."

Karol Bardon, who happened to be passing by a few moments later, on his way to the toolshed on the estate, wrote that Lewin had been stoned to death:

> Around the corner from the foundry adjacent to the toolshed an inhabitant of Jedwabne, Wisniewski, was standing. . . . Wisniewski called me, and I came closer and Wisniewski pointed to a massacred cadaver of a young man of Mosaic persuasion, about twenty-two years old, whose name was Lewin, and said to me, Look, mister, we killed this S.O.B. with stones. . . . Wisniewski showed me a stone weighing twelve to fourteen kilograms and said, I smacked him good with this stone and he won't get up anymore.

This murder took place at the beginning of the pogrom. As Bardon said, on his way to the toolshed he saw only about a hundred Jews in the square; on his way back, the number had grown considerably. In another part of town, a Pole named Wincenty Goscicki had just returned home from his job as a night watchman:

> In the morning when I went to bed, my wife came and told me to get up and said that bad things were going on. Near our house people were beating Jews with clubs. I got up then and went outside the house. Then I was called by Urbanowski who told me, Look what is going on, and showed me four Jewish corpses. These were 1. Fischman, 2. the two Styjakowskis and Blubert. Then I hid in the house.

Early that day, the Jews understood that they were in danger. Many tried to escape into the fields, but only a few succeeded. It was difficult to get out of town without being noticed, as small vigilante groups of peasants were seeking out Jews who were hiding or fleeing. A dozen teen-agers grabbed Nielawicki, the sixteen-year-old, who was in the fields trying to sneak away to Wizna when the pogrom began. He was beaten up and brought to the square. Mietek Olszewicz, too, was caught in the fields by peasant youths, beaten up, and brought back to town. Nielawicki and Olszewicz managed to get away, hide, and survive that day, but Bardon, on his trip to the toolshed, saw "on the left side of the road . . . in the fields belonging to the estate, civilians mounted on horses, wielding thick wooden clubs," who were patrolling the area.

Uncoördinated incidents of violence occurred simultaneously throughout the town, with Karolak and the town council exercising only general supervision, such as enlisting people for guard duty in the square. They monitored what was happening and made sure at critical moments that the goal of the pogrom was being carried out. Otherwise, people were free to improvise.

Bardon, later in the day, saw Wisniewski in the same place as before, near Lewin's body:

> I understood that Wisniewski was waiting here for something. I took all the necessary parts from the toolshed, and on my way back, at a distance of about a hundred metres from the toolshed, I met the same two young men whom I had seen for the first time when I went to the toolshed. [He later identifies them as Jerzy Laudanski and Kalinowski.] I understood that they were coming to Wisniewski, to the place where Lewin had been killed, and they were bringing another man of Mosaic persuasion, a married owner of the mechanical mill where I had been employed till March, 1939, called Hersz Zdrojewicz. They held him under the arms and blood was flowing from his head over his neck and onto his torso. Zdrojewicz said to me, Save me, Mr. Bardon. Being afraid of these murderers, I replied, I cannot help you, sir, and I passed them by.

Thus, in one part of town Laudanski and Kalinowski were killing Zdrojewicz; in front of Goscicki's house, somebody was clubbing four Jews; in a pond near Lomzynska Street, "Wladyslaw Luba . . . drowned two Jewish blacksmiths"; at another site, Czeslaw Mierzejewski raped and then killed a young woman named Judes Ibram; Gitele Nadolnik, the youngest daughter of a teacher, whom the townspeople knew because they had learned to read at her father's house, was decapitated, and the murderers later kicked her head around; in the square, "Dobrzanska asked for water, then fainted; no one was allowed to help her, and her mother was killed because she wanted to bring water; Betka Brzozowska was killed with a baby in her arms." Other Jews were beaten, and their houses were plundered.

At the same time, more organized forms of persecution were taking place; for instance, Jews were driven in groups to the Jewish cemetery to be killed. According to the trial testimony of Abram Boruszczak, a Jew, "They took healthier men and chased them to the cemetery and ordered them to dig a pit, and after it was dug out Jews were killed every which way, one with an iron rod, another with a knife, still another with a club." In a second deposition, Wasersztejn said, "Stanislaw Sielawa was murdering with an iron hook, stabbing in the stomach. The witness"—Wasersztejn—"was hiding in the bushes. He heard the screaming. They killed twenty-eight men in one place from among the strongest. Sielawa took away one Jew. His tongue was cut off. Then a long silence."

The murderers got excited and worked at a frantic pace. "I stood on Przytulska Street," an older woman named Bronislawa Kalinowska said, "and Jerzy Laudanski, inhabitant of Jedwabne, was running down the street, and he said that he had already killed two or three Jews; he was very nervous and ran away."

It must have soon become apparent that so large a number of people could not be killed by such primitive methods in a day, at which point the perpetrators moved to kill all the remaining Jews at once, by burning them together. This method had been used a few days earlier, during the Radzilow pogrom. As Jozef Chrzanowski, a defendant in the 1949 trial, testified, "When I came to the square, they"—Sobuta and Wasilewski—"told me to give my barn to burn the Jews. But I started pleading to spare my barn, to which they agreed and left my barn in peace. They told me to help them chase the Jews to Bronislaw Szleszynski's barn."

According to the defendant Roman Gorski, "I saw how Sobuta and Wasilewski took some dozen Jews from among the assembled and ordered them to do some ridiculous gymnastics exercises." Before the Jews were herded from the square to the barn, Sobuta and his colleagues organized a sideshow. During the Soviet occupation, a statue of Lenin had been erected in the town, right next to the main square, and the Memorial Book and the trial testimonies confirm Szmul Wasersztejn's earlier deposition. As one account put it, "A group of Jews was brought to the little square to take down Lenin's statue. When the Jews broke the statue, they were told to put its various pieces on some boards and carry them around, and the rabbi was told to walk in front with his hat on a stick, and all had to sing, 'The war is because of us, the war is for us.' While carrying the statue all the Jews were chased toward the barn, and the barn was doused with gasoline and lit, and in this manner fifteen hundred Jewish people perished."

Last summer, an elderly Polish woman named Halina Popiolek, who was a young girl in 1941, told a journalist for the newspaper *Gazeta Pomorska:*

> I was not present when they were beheading Jews, or piercing them to death with sharp spikes. I also did not see how our people ordered young Jewesses to drown in a pond. My mother's sister saw it. She was all in tears when she came to tell us about this. I saw how they ordered young Jewish boys to take off Lenin's monument, how they were told to carry it around, and shout, "War is because of us." I saw how they were beaten at the time with rubber truncheons, how Jews were massacred in the synagogue, and how the massacred Lewiniuk, who was still breathing, was buried alive by people. . . . They chased them all to a barn. Poured kerosene all around.

A thick crowd was milling around the barn, helping to shove the beaten, wounded, and terrorized Jews inside. "We chased Jews under the barn," Jerzy Lau-

"Hon, would you say a kind word to Maria? She's entirely in technology stocks."

danski later reported, “and we ordered them to enter, and the Jews had to enter.”

Here is the conclusion of Wasersztejn’s deposition of April, 1945:

> Beards of old Jews were burned, newborn babies were killed at their mothers’ breasts, people were beaten murderously and forced to sing and dance. In the end they proceeded to the main action—the burning. The entire town was surrounded by guards so that nobody could escape; then the Jews were ordered to line up in a column, four in a row, and the ninety-year-old rabbi and the Kosher slaughterer were put in front, they were given a red banner, and all were ordered to sing and were chased into the barn. Hooligans bestially beat them up on the way. Near the gate a few hooligans were standing, playing various instruments in order to drown the screams of horrified victims. Some Jews tried to defend themselves, but they were defenseless. Bloodied and wounded, they were pushed into the barn. Then the barn was doused with kerosene and lit, and the bandits went around to search Jewish homes, to look for the remaining sick and children. The sick people they found they carried to the barn themselves, and as for the little children, they roped a few together by their legs and carried them on their backs, then put them on pitchforks and threw them onto smoldering coals.
>
> After the fire they used axes to knock golden teeth from still not entirely decomposed bodies and in other ways violated the corpses of holy martyrs.

Michal Kuropatwa, a Jewish coachman, who sometime earlier had helped a Polish Army officer hide from his Soviet pursuers, was among those herded into the barn. When the leaders of the pogrom noticed him in the crowd, he was taken out and told that, because he had helped a Polish officer, he could go home. He refused, choosing to share the fate of his people.

The Poles doused the barn with kerosene, which came from a warehouse owned by Antoni Niebrzydowski. Referring to his brother Jerzy and to Eugeniusz Kalinowski, Niebrzydowski said, “They brought the eight litres of kerosene that I had issued to them and doused the barn filled with Jews and lit it; what followed I do not know.”

At the last moment, four people inside the barn managed to escape. A surge of hot air may have blown the barn door open. A young Jew named Janek Neumark was standing right next to it with his sister, her five-year-old daughter, and another young man. Stanislaw Sielawa—the Sielawas were the family to whom Jacob Baker’s grandmother had given milk years before—barred their exit, wielding an axe. Neumark wrestled the axe away from him, and they managed to flee and hide in the cemetery. The last thing Neumark remembered was the sight of his father, engulfed in flames.

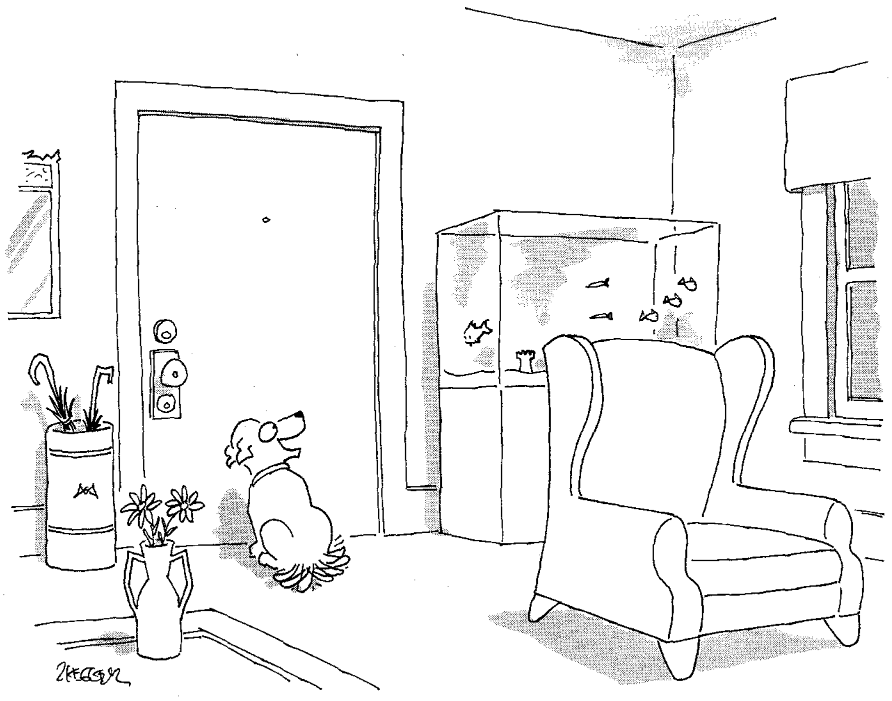
Halina Popiolek recalled, “It took but two minutes, but the scream . . . I can still hear it.” The fire must have spread unevenly. It appears to have moved from east to west, perhaps on account of the wind. Afterward, a few charred corpses were found in the east wing of the incinerated building; there were some more in the center, and toward the western end a large pile. Those whose bodies were in the upper layer of the heap had been burned to death, but those beneath had been crushed and asphyxiated; their clothes in many cases remained intact. “They were so intertwined with one another that bodies could not be disentangled,” recalled an elderly peasant who, as a young boy, had been among a group of men sent to bury the dead. In unwitting confirmation of Wasersztejn’s testimony, he added:

> In spite of this people were trying to search the corpses, looking for valuables sewn into clothing. I touched a Brolin shoe-polish box. It clinked. I cut it through with a shovel, and some coins glittered—I think golden tsarist five-ruble coins. People jumped over to collect them, and this drew the attention of onlooking gendarmes. They searched everybody. And if someone put the find in his pocket, they took it away and gave him a good shove. But anyone who hid it in his shoe saved it.

In my research, I found numerous other examples of plunder, enough to convince me that robbery cannot be dismissed as a motive for the crime.

The slaughter of the Jews in Jedwabne lasted an entire day, and it was confined to a relatively small area. Szleszynski’s barn, where the majority of the pogrom victims died, was very near the town’s central square. The Jewish cemetery, where victims were knifed, clubbed, and stoned to death, was just across the road. Everybody who was in the town that day and in possession of a sense of sight, smell, or hearing either participated in or witnessed the deaths of the Jews.

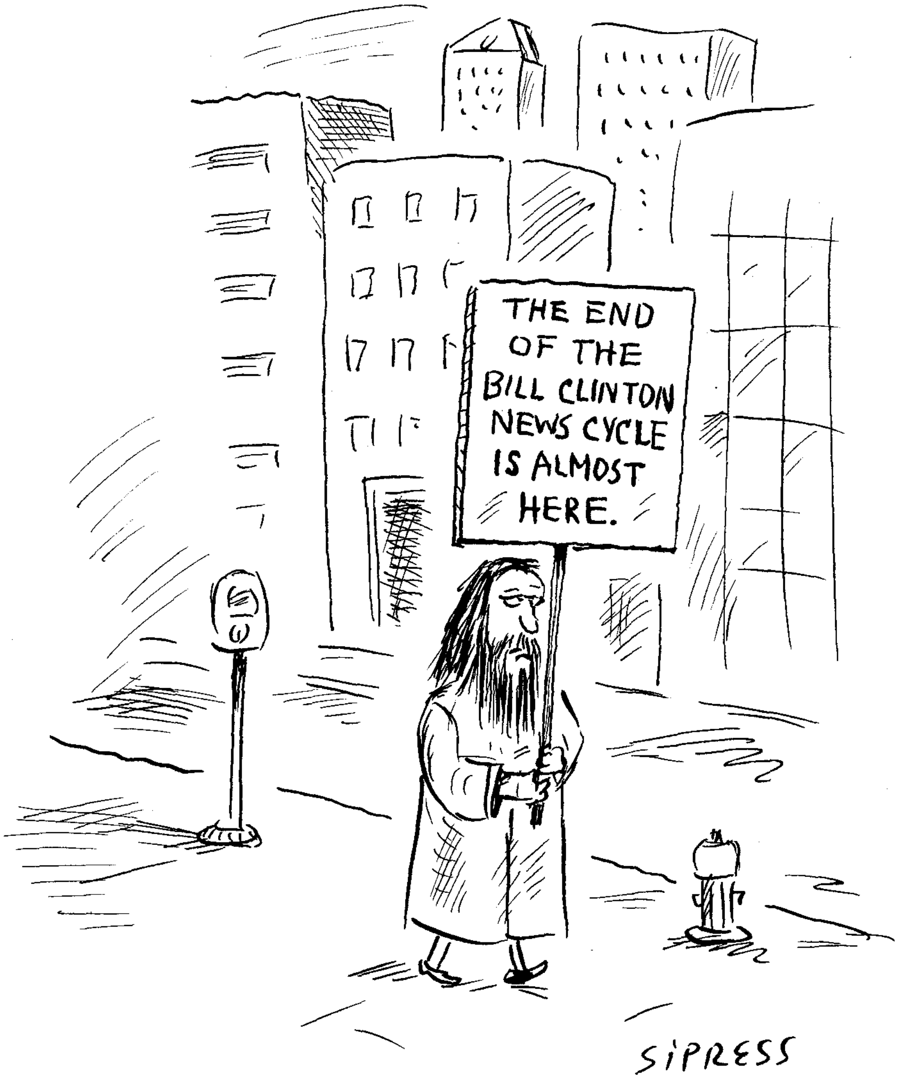
It was the middle of a very hot July, and the burned and asphyxiated corpses of the barn victims had to be buried quickly. There were no more Jews in town who could be ordered to do it. “Late in the evening,” Wincenty Goscicki, the night watchman, recalls, “I was taken by the Germans to bury those burned corpses. But I could not do this because when I saw this, I started to vomit and I was released from burying the cadavers.” Apparently, he was not the only one who couldn’t stomach the job. “On the second or the third day after the murder,” Bardon testified, “I was standing with Mayor Karolak in the



“They’re back! They’re back! How do I look? Oh, never mind! Never mind!”

square not far from the outpost, and the commander of the German gendarmerie, Adamy, came up and said to the Mayor with emphasis, So, you managed to kill people and burn them, eh? But no one is eager to bury them, eh? By morning, all must be buried! Understood?”

News of this angry outburst spread. Almost sixty years later, Leon Dziedzic, from Przestrzele, near Jedwabne, could still quote the German commander’s words to the reporter from *Rzeczpospolita*: “ ‘You insisted that you’d put things in order with the Jews, but you don’t know how to put things in order at all.’ He was afraid that an epidemic might break out, because it was very hot and dogs were already getting at them”—the corpses. But this was an “impossible job,” as Dziedzic said in an interview with *Gazeta Pomorska*. The piled-up bodies of the victims were tangled like “the roots of a tree. Somebody hit upon the idea that we should tear them into pieces and throw these pieces into the dugout. They brought pitchforks, and they tore the bodies as best we could: here a head, there a leg.”


THE END OF THE BILL CLINTON NEWS CYCLE IS ALMOST HERE.

After July 10th, the German occupation administration reëstablished a kind of routine, one that would last for three years. Jewish survivors returned to town. They stayed for a while—some worked at the gendarmerie outpost—but in the end they were driven by the Nazis to the ghetto in Lomza. Seven Jews—Szmul Wasersztejn and his brother; Janek and Leja Kubrzanski; Mietek Olszewicz and his fiancée; and Eljasz Gradowski—owed their lives to a Pole named Antonina Wyrzykowska, who lived with her husband, Aleksander, in the nearby hamlet of Janczewko. The Wyrzykowskis were farmers. For almost three years, Wyrzykowska kept the fugitives hidden on her compound and brought them food. (Had she not saved Wasersztejn, the story of the Jedwabne massacre might never have been told.) Even her husband did not know the extent of her rescue efforts—he knew of only four or five Jews, or “martyrs,” as he called them—hiding in their compound. But Wyrzykowska’s caution was justified.

After the area was “liberated” by the advancing Red Army, in the summer of 1944, Jewish survivors continued to fear for their lives. Armed nationalists who had fought the Germans as underground guerrillas now sometimes turned their guns against the newly established authorities, and occasionally against the surviving Jews and their rescuers. Here is the Wyrzykowskis’ account:

> I, Aleksander Wyrzykowski, together with my wife, Antonina, wanted to make the following deposition. When the Red Army came, these martyrs were free; we dressed them up as best we could. The first one went to his house, but his family had perished so he came to eat with us. The rest went to their places.
>
> One Sunday I noticed that guerrillas were coming and they said, We’ll come over today and get rid of the Jew, and the other said that they would kill everybody one night. From this time on the Jew slept in the field in a dugout for potatoes; I gave him a pillow and my coat. I went to warn the others as well. They started to hide. The two girls who were their fiancées the guerrillas had nothing against, and those bandits told them not to say a word to their fiancés that they came. This same night they came to us to get the Jew; they said to give him away, that they would kill him and would no longer bother us. My wife replied that I had gone to visit my sister, and that the Jew had gone to Lomza and hadn’t come back. Then they started to beat her so that she didn’t have a white patch on her body, only black skin everywhere. They took what good things they found in the house and told her to drive them back. My wife took them in a horse cart near to Jedwabne.
>
> When she returned, the Jew came out of the hiding place and saw how she was beaten up. After a certain time another Jew, Janek Kubrzanski, came. We talked afterward and decided to run away from this place. We took residence in Lomza. My wife left a little child with her parents. From Lomza we moved to Bialystok, because we feared for our lives. . . .
>
> In 1946 we moved to Bielsk Podlaski. But after a few years this was found out, and we had to leave Bielsk Podlaski.

Some years after Aleksander died, Antonina Wyrzykowska left Poland, and settled near Chicago. ♦

FICTION

NOBODY'S BUSINESS

BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

Every so often a man called for Sang, wanting to marry her. Sang usually didn't know these men. Sometimes she had never even heard of them. But they'd heard that she was pretty and smart and thirty and Bengali and still single, and so these men, most of whom also happened to be Bengali, would procure her number from someone who knew someone who knew her parents, who, according to Sang, desperately wanted her to be married. According to Sang, these men always confused details when they spoke to her, saying they'd heard that she studied physics, when really it was philosophy, or that she'd graduated from Columbia, when really it was N.Y.U., calling her Sangeeta, when really she went by Sang. They were impressed that she was getting her doctorate at Harvard, when really she'd dropped out of Harvard after a semester, and was working part-time at a bookstore in the square.

Sang's housemates, Paul and Heather, could always tell when it was a prospective groom on the phone. "Oh. Hi," Sang would say, sitting at the imitation-walnut kitchen table, rolling her eyes, coin-colored eyes that were sometimes green. She would slouch in her chair, looking bothered but resigned, as if a subway she were riding had halted between stations. To Paul's mild disappointment, Sang was never rude to these men. She listened as they explained the complicated, far-fetched connection between them, connections Paul vaguely envied in spite of the fact that he shared a house with Sang, and a kitchen, and a subscription to the *Globe*. The suitors called from as far away as Los Angeles, as close by as Watertown. Once, she told Paul and Heather, she had actually agreed to meet one of these men, and he had driven her north up I-93, pointing from the highway to the corporation he worked for. Then he'd taken her to a Dunkin' Donuts, where, over crullers and coffee, he'd proposed.

Sometimes Sang would take notes during these conversations, on the message pad kept next to the phone. She'd write down the man's name, or "Carnegie Mellon" or "likes mystery novels" before her pen drifted into scribbles and stars and ticktacktoe games. To be polite, she asked a few questions, too, about whether the man enjoyed his work as an economist, or a dentist, or a metallurgical engineer. Her excuse to these men, her rebuttal to their offers to wine and dine her, was always the same white lie: she was busy at the moment with classes, its being Harvard and all. Sometimes, if Paul happened to be sitting at the table, she would write him a note in the middle of the conversation: "He sounds like he's twelve" or "Total dweeb" or "This guy threw up once in my parents' swimming pool," waving the pad for Paul's benefit as she cradled the phone to her ear.

It was only after Sang hung up that she complained. How dare these men call? she'd say. How dare they hunt her down? It was a violation of her privacy, an insult to her adulthood. It was pathetic. If only Paul and Heather could hear them, going on about themselves. At this point, Heather would sometimes say, "God, Sang, I can't believe you're complaining. Dozens of men, successful men, possibly even handsome, want to marry you, sight unseen. And you expect us to feel sorry for you?" Heather, a law student at Boston College, had been bitterly single for five years. She told Sang the proposals were romantic, but Sang shook her head. "It's not love." In Sang's opinion it was practically an arranged marriage. These men weren't really interested in *her*. They were interested in a mythical creature created by an intricate chain of gossip, a web of wishful, Indian-community thinking in which she was an aging, overlooked poster child for years of *bharat natyam* classes, perfect S.A.T.s. Had they any idea who she actually was and how she made a living, in spite of her test scores, which was by running a cash register and arranging paperback books in pyramid configurations, they would want nothing to do with her. "And besides," she always reminded Paul and Heather, "I have a boyfriend."

"You're like Penelope," Paul ventured one evening. He had lately been rereading Lattimore's Homer, in preparation for his orals in English literature the following spring.

"Penelope?" She was standing at the microwave, heating some rice. Paul watched as she removed the plate and mixed the steaming rice with a spoonful of the dark-red hot lime pickle which lived next to his peanut butter in the door of the refrigerator.

"From the Odyssey?" Paul said gently, a question to match her question. He was tall without being lank, with solid fingers and calves, and fine straw-colored hair. The most noticeable aspect of his appearance was a pair of expensive designer glasses, their maroon frames perfectly round, which an attractive salesgirl in a frame shop on Beacon Street had talked him into buying. Paul had not liked the glasses, even as he was being fitted for them, and had not grown to like them since.

"Right, the Odyssey," Sang said, sitting down at the table. "Penelope. Only I can't knit."

"Weave," he said, correcting her. "It was a shroud Penelope kept weaving and unweaving, to ward off her suitors."

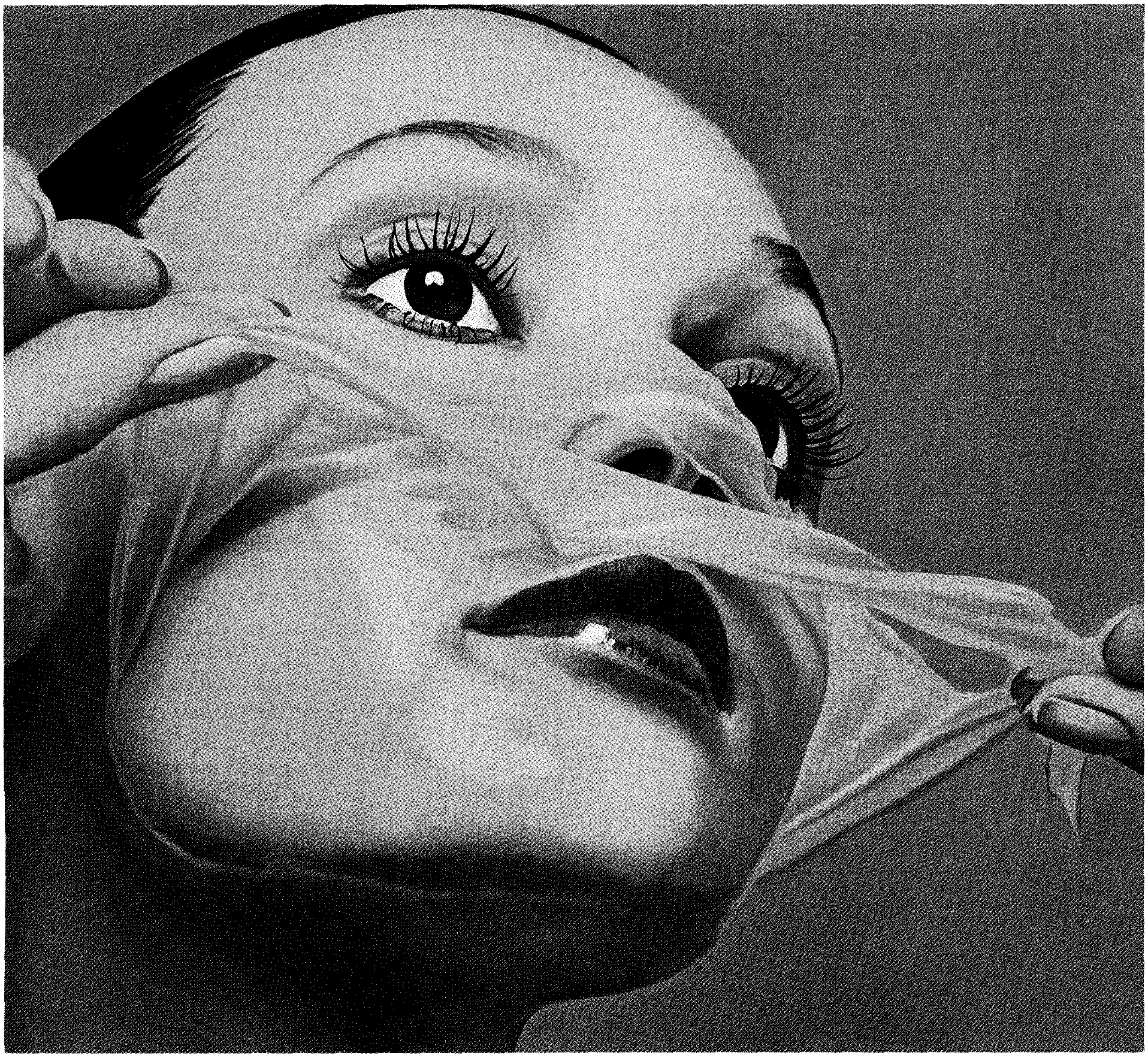
Sang lifted a forkful of the rice to her lips, blowing on it so that it would cool. "Then, who's the woman who knits?" she asked. She looked at Paul. "You would know."

Paul paused, eager to impress her, but his mind had drawn a blank. He knew it was someone in Dickens, had

RICHARD PHILLIPS, "PEEL" (1996)/FRIEDRICH PETZEL GALLERY/COLL. RICHARD AND DARIA FEINSTEIN

the paperbacks up in his room. "Be right back," he said. Then he stopped, relieved. "A Tale of Two Cities," he told her. "Madame Defarge."

Paul had answered the phone the first time Sang called, at nine o'clock one Saturday morning in July, in reference to the housemate ad he and Heather had placed in the *Phoenix*. The call had roused him from sleep, and he had wondered, standing there, groggy in his bathrobe, what sort of name Sang was, half expecting a Japanese woman. It wasn't until she wrote out a check for her security deposit at the end of her visit that he saw that her official name was Sangeeta Biswas. This was the name he would see on her mail, on the labels of the thick, pungent *Vogue* magazines she received each month, and in the window of the electric bill she agreed to take on. Heather had been in the shower when Sang arrived and pressed the doorbell that chimed two solemn tones, so Paul had greeted her alone. She had worn her long hair loose, something Paul was to learn she rarely did, and as he walked behind her he had liked the way it clung protectively to her body, over the rise of her shoulder blades. She had admired the spectacular central staircase, as most everyone did, letting her hand linger over the bannister. The staircase turned six times at right angles after every six steps, and was constructed of dark gleaming wood with the lustre of cognac. It was the only thing of enduring beauty in the house, a false promise of what was above: ugly brown cabinets in the kitchen, moldy bathrooms with missing tiles, omnipresent oatmeal carpeting to protect the ears of the landlords, who lived below.



She had remarked on what a lot of space it was, pacing the landing before joining Paul in the vacant room. There was a built-in hutch in the corner, with Doric pilasters and glass-paned doors, which Sang opened and closed. Paul told her that the room had originally been the dining room, the cabinet intended to store china. There was a bathroom across the landing; Paul and Heather shared the larger one, upstairs. "I feel like I'm standing inside an empty refrigerator,” she’d said, referring to the fact that the walls, once blue, had been painted over with a single coat of white; the effect, under the glare of the ceiling light, was stark and cold. She ran a hand along one wall and carefully removed a stray piece of tape. Once, there had been an arched doorway connecting the room to the kitchen, since filled in, but Sang noted that the arch was still visible, like a scar in the plaster.

While she was there, the phone rang, another person replying to the ad, but by then she had handed over her deposit. She had met Heather, and the three of them had chatted in the living room with its peeling bay window and its soft filthy couch and its yellow papasan chair. They told her about their system for splitting up the chores, and about the landlords, both doctors at Brigham and Women’s. They told her there was only one phone jack in the house, in the kitchen. The phone was attached to a cord so long that they could all drag it to their rooms, though at times the price to pay for dragging the cord too far was a persistent crackle.

“We thought about having another line put in, but it’s pretty expensive,” Heather said.

“It’s not a big deal,” Sang said.

And Paul, who seldom spoke on the phone to anyone, said nothing at all.

She had practically nothing to contribute to the house, no pots or appliances, nothing for the kitchen apart from an ailing hanging plant that shed yellow heart-shaped leaves. A friend helped her move in one Sunday, a male friend who was not, Paul gathered, her boyfriend (for she had mentioned one on her first visit, telling them that he was in Cairo for the summer visiting his parents, that he was Egyptian, and that he taught Middle Eastern history at Harvard). The friend’s name was Charles. He wore high-top sneakers and a bright-orange bowling shirt, his hair tied back in a stubby ponytail. He was telling Sang about a date he’d had the night before, as they unloaded a futon, two big battered suitcases, a series of shopping bags, and a few boxes from the back of a pickup truck. Paul had offered to help, calling out from the deck where he was trying to read “The Canterbury Tales,” but Sang had said no, it was nothing. Their talk distracted him and yet he remained, watching Sang through the railing. Charles was teasingly forbidding her to buy too many things, so that moving out would be just as easy.

Sang had been laughing at him, but now she stopped, her expression pensive. She looked up at the house, a balled-up comforter in her arms. “I don’t know, Charles. I don’t know how long I’ll be here.”

“He still doesn’t want to live together until you’re married?”

She shook her head.

“What does he say?”

“That he doesn’t want to spoil things.”

Charles shifted the weight of the box he was carrying. “But he acknowledges the fact that you’re getting married.”

She turned back to the truck. “He says things like ‘When we have kids, we’ll buy a big house in Lexington.’ ”

“You’ve been together three years,” Charles said. “So he’s a little old-fashioned. That’s one of the things you like about him, right?”

The next few nights, Sang slept on the couch in the living room, her things stored temporarily in the corner, in order to paint her room. Both Paul and Heather were surprised by this; neither of them had made an effort to do much to their rooms when moving in. For the walls, she had chosen a soothing sage green; for the trim, the palest lavender, a color that the paint company called “mole.” It wasn’t what she imagined a mole to look like at all, she told Paul, stirring the can vigorously on the kitchen counter. “What would you have named it?” she asked him suddenly. He could think of nothing. It was only upstairs, sitting alone at his big plywood desk, piled with thick books full of tissue-thin pages, that he thought of the ice cream his mother always ordered at Newport Creamery when his family went on Sunday nights for hamburgers. His mother had died years ago, his father soon after. They’d adopted Paul late in life, when they were in their fifties, so people had often mistaken them for his grandparents. That evening in the kitchen, when Sang walked in, Paul said, “Black raspberry.”

“What?”

“The paint.”

She had a small, slightly worried-looking smile on her face, a smile one might give a confused child. “That’s funny.”

“The name?”

“No. It’s just a little funny the way you

picked up a conversation we had, like, six hours ago, and expected me to remember what you were talking about."

As soon as Paul opened the door of his room the next morning, he detected the fresh yet cloying smell of paint, heard the swish of the roller as it moved up and down a wall. After Heather had left the house, Sang started to play music: one Billie Holiday CD after another. They were having a spell of sticky, sweltering days, and Paul was working in the relative cool of the living room, a few paces across the landing from Sang.

"Oh, my God," she exclaimed, noticing him on her way to the bathroom. "This music must be driving you crazy." She wore cut-off jeans, a black tank top with straps like those of a brassiere. Her feet were bare, her calves and thighs flecked with paint.

He lied, telling her he often studied to music. Because he noticed it was the kitchen she went to most often, to rinse her brushes or eat some yogurt out of a big tub, the second day he moved himself there, where he made a pot of tea, and, much to her amusement, set the alarm on his wristwatch to know when to take out the leaves. In the afternoon, her sister called, from London, with a voice identical to Sang's. For a moment, Paul had actually believed it was Sang herself, mysteriously calling him from her room. "Can't talk, I'm painting my room sage and mole," she reported cheerfully to her sister, and when she replaced the receiver of the dark-brown phone there were a few of her mole-colored fingerprints on the surface.

He liked studying in her fleeting company. She was impressed with how far he'd got on his Ph.D.—she told him that after she dropped out of Harvard a year ago her mother had locked herself up in her bedroom for a week and her father had refused to speak to her. She'd had it with academia, hated how competitive it was, how monkish it forced one to become. That was what her boyfriend did, always blocking off chunks of his day and working at home with the phone unplugged, writing papers for the next conference. "You'll be good at it," she assured Paul. "You're devoted, I can tell." When she asked him what his exam entailed, he told her it would last three hours, that there would be three questioners, and that it would cover three centuries of English and European literature.

"And they can ask you anything?" she wanted to know.

"Within reason."

"Wow."

He didn't tell her the truth—that he'd already taken the exam the year before and failed. His committee and a handful of students were the only ones who knew, and it was to avoid them that Paul preferred to stay at home now. He had failed not because he wasn't prepared but because his mind had betrayed him that bright May morning, inexplicably cramped like a stubborn muscle that curled his foot during sleep. For five harrowing minutes, as the professors stared at him with their legal pads full of questions, as trains came and went along Commonwealth Avenue, he had not been able to reply to the first question, about comic villainy in "Richard III." He had read the play so many times he could picture each scene, not as it might be performed on a stage but, rather, as the pale printed columns in his Pelican Shakespeare. He felt himself go crimson; it was the nightmare he had been having for months before the exam. His interrogators had been patient, had tried another question, which he had stammered miserably through, pausing in the middle of a thought and unable to continue, until, finally, one of the professors, white hair like a snowy wreath around his otherwise naked head, put out a hand, as might a policeman stopping traffic, and said, "The candidate's simply not ready." Paul had walked home, the tie he'd bought for the occasion stuffed into his pocket, and for a week he had not left his room. When he returned to campus, he was ten pounds thinner, and the department secretary had asked him if he'd fallen in love.

Sang had been living with them for a week when a suitor called. By then, the painting was finished, the dreary room transformed. She was removing masking tape from the edges of the window panes when Paul told her someone named Asim Bhattacharya was calling from Geneva. "Tell him I'm not in," she said, without hesitating. He wrote down the name, spelled out carefully by the caller, who had said before hanging up, "Just tell her it's Pinkoo."

More men called. One asked Paul, dejectedly, if he was Sang's boyfriend. The mere possibility, articulated by a stranger, had jolted him. Such a thing had happened once before in the house, the first year Paul had lived there—two house-

mates had fallen in love, had moved out in order to marry each other. “No,” he told the caller. “I’m just her housemate.” Nevertheless, for the rest of the day he had felt burdened by the question, worried that he’d transgressed somehow, simply by answering the phone. A few days later, he told Sang. She laughed. “He’s probably horrified now, knowing that I live with a man,” she said. “Next time,” she advised him, “say yes.”

A week afterward, the three of them were in the kitchen, Heather filling a thermos with echinacea tea because she had come down with a cold and had to spend all day in classes, Sang hunched over the newspaper and coffee. The night before, she had locked herself up in her bathroom, and now there were some reddish highlights in her hair. When the phone rang and Paul picked up, he assumed it was another suitor on the line, for, like many of Sang’s suitors, the caller had a slight foreign accent, though this one was more refined than awkward. The only difference was that instead of asking for Sangeeta he asked to speak to Sang. When Paul asked who was calling, he said, in a slightly impatient way, “I am her boyfriend.” The words landed in Paul’s chest like the dull yet painful taps of a doctor’s instrument. He saw that Sang was looking up at him expectantly, her chair already partly pushed back from the table.

“For me?”

He nodded, and Sang took the phone into her room.

“Boyfriend,” Paul reported to Heather.

“What’s his name?”

Paul shrugged. “Didn’t say.”

“Well, she must be happy as a clam,” Heather remarked with some asperity, screwing the lid onto her thermos.

Paul felt sorry for Heather, with her red, chapped nose and her thick-waisted body, but more than that he felt protective of Sang. “What do you mean?” he said.

“Because her lover’s back, and now she can tell all those other guys to fuck off.”

The boyfriend was standing on the sidewalk with Sang, looking up at the house, as Paul returned on his bike from a day of photocopying at the library. A bottle-green BMW was parked at the curb. The couple stood with an assumed intimacy, their dark heads tilting toward each other.

“Keep away from the window when you change your clothes,” Paul heard him say. “I can see through the curtain. Couldn’t you get a room at the back?” Paul stepped off his bike at a slight distance from them, adjusted the straps of his backpack. He was uncomfortably aware that he was shabbily dressed—in shorts, and Birkenstocks, and an old Dartmouth T-shirt, his pale legs covered with matted blond hair. The boyfriend wore perfectly fitted faded jeans, a white shirt, a navy-blue blazer, and brown leather shoes. His sharp features commanded admiration without being imposing. His hair, in contrast, was on the long side, framing his face in a lavish, unexpected style. He looked several years older than Sang, Paul decided, but in certain ways he strongly resembled her, for they shared the same height, the same gilded complexion, the same sprinkle of moles above and below their lips. As Paul walked toward them, Sang’s boyfriend was still inspecting the house, searching the yellow-and-ochre Victorian façade as if for defects, until he looked away suddenly, distracted by the bark of a dog.

“Your roommates have a dog?” the boyfriend asked. He took an odd, dance-like step to the left, moving partly behind Sang.

“No, silly,” Sang said teasingly, running her hand down the back of his head. “No dogs, no smokers. Those were the only listings I called, because of you.” The barking stopped, and the ensuing silence seemed to punctuate her words. There was a necklace around her neck, lapis beads she now fingered in a way that made Paul think they were a gift. “Paul, this is Farouk. Farouk’s afraid of dogs.” She kissed Farouk on the cheek.

“Freddy,” Farouk said, nodding rather than extending a hand, his words directed more to Sang than to Paul. She shook her head.

“For the millionth time, I’m not calling you Freddy.”

Farouk glanced at her without humor. “Why not? You expect people to call you Sang.”

She was unbothered. “That’s differ-

A REGULAR MESS

I took (drove my Toyota) a jug of my one-day’s
urine up the road to the Care Center this

morning early, the snow hardly heavier than
rime, the cushioniest grit: this, I

said to the lady, the nurse, all in white,
hair a little creamier, is my creatinine test

results: fill out this form, she said: I sd,
I filled it out yesterday, one like it: well,

she said, fill out another one: then she
picked up my full bottle-jug and said, you are

very generous: she said, some people come in
here with about *that* much (very little) from

a whole day’s effort, you are really generous:
I said yeah, that’s without any beers, too:

I felt proud: but I recalled the doctor had
said it’s not the quantity, it’s the quality:

so now I must wait to see if I did a whole lot
of something good or a whole lot of something

bad, perhaps intermediate: I liked her, the
lady in white, a little on the old side but

young enough for me: old people don't see
much age in old people's faces: they see a

young woman in a wreck: so then she came back
from the refrigerator where she stored my

generosity and said, you have to have a blood
test, too, a comprehensive profile: Jesus, I

said, I just had an egg, ten minutes ago, does
that make any difference: well, well, well,

maybe so: better come in tomorrow morning,
nothing to eat, no coffee, just water: I'll

be here, I said, at seven: if I don't see you,
she said, have happy holidays: it was so fine

outside, the sun broken through on the crisp
snow, a good grip for the soles, no other

footprints around, just mine coming in. . . .

—*A. R. Ammons*
(1926-2001)

ent. That's actually a part of my name."

"Well, I'm Paul, and that's pretty much all you can call me," Paul said. No one laughed.

Suddenly, she was never at home. When she was, she stayed in her room, often on the phone, the door shut. By dinner, she tended to be gone. The items on her shelf of the refrigerator, the big tubs of yogurt and the crackers and the tabouli, sat untouched. The yogurt eventually sported a mantle of green fuzz, setting off shrieks of disgust when Sang finally opened the lid. It was only natural, Paul told himself, for the two of them to want to be alone together. He was surprised to run into her one day in the small gourmet grocery in the neighborhood, her basket piled high with food she never brought back to the house, purple net bags of shallots, goat cheese in oil, meat wrapped in butcher paper. Because it was raining, Paul, who had his car with him, offered her a ride. She told him no thank you, and headed off to the T stop, a Harvard baseball cap on her head, hugging the grocery bag to her chest. He had no idea where Farouk lived; he pictured a beautiful house on Brattle Street, French doors and pretty molding.

It was always something of a shock to find Farouk in the house. He visited infrequently and seemed to appear and disappear without a trace. Unless Paul looked out the window and saw the BMW, always precisely parked under the shade of a birch tree, it was impossible to tell if he was there. He never said hello or goodbye; instead, he behaved as if Sang were the sole occupant of the house. They never sat in the living room, or in the kitchen. Only once, when Paul returned from a bike ride, did he see them overhead, eating lunch on the deck. They were sitting next to each other, cross-legged, and Sang was extending a fork toward Farouk's mouth, her other hand cupped beneath it. By the time Paul entered the house, they had retreated into her room.

When she wasn't with Farouk, she did things for him. She read through proofs of an article he'd written, checking it for typos. She scheduled his doctor's appointments. Once, she spent all morning with the yellow pages, pricing tiles; Farouk was thinking of redoing his kitchen.

By the end of September, Paul was aware of a routine: Mondays, which Sang had off from the bookstore, Farouk came for lunch. The two of them would eat in her room; sometimes he heard the sounds of their talking as they ate, or their spoons tapping against soup bowls, or the Nocturnes of Chopin. They were silent lovers—mercifully so, compared with other couples he'd overheard in the house through the years—but their presence soon prompted him to go to the library on Mondays, for he was affected nevertheless, embarrassed by the time her door had been partly open and he'd seen Farouk zipping his jeans. Three years had passed since Theresa, the one girlfriend he'd ever had. He'd dated no one since. Because of Theresa, he'd chosen a graduate school in Boston. For three months, he had lived with her in her apartment on St. Botolph Street. For Thanksgiving, he'd gone with her to her parents' house in Deerfield. It was there that it had ended. "I'm sorry, Paul, I can't help it, I just don't like the way you kiss me," she had told him once they'd gone to bed. He remembered himself sitting naked on one side of the mattress, in a room he was suddenly aware he was never again to see. He had not argued; in the wake of his shame, he became strangely efficient and agreeable, with her, with everyone.

Late one night, Paul was in bed reading when he heard a car pull up to the house. The clock on his desk said twenty past two. He shut off his lamp and got up to look through the window. It was November. A full moon illuminated the wide, desolate street, lined with trash bags and recycling bins. There was a taxi in front of the house, the engine still running. Sang emerged from it alone. For close to a minute, she stood there on the sidewalk. He waited by the window until she climbed up to the porch, then listened as she climbed the staircase and shut the door to her room. Farouk had picked her up that afternoon; Paul had seen her stepping into his car. He thought perhaps they'd fought, though the next day he detected no signs of discord. He overheard her speaking to Farouk on the phone in good spirits, deciding on a video to rent. But that night, around the same time, the same thing happened. The third night, he stayed awake on purpose, making sure she got in O.K.

The following morning, a Sunday, Paul, Heather, and Sang had pancakes together in the kitchen. Sang was playing Louis Armstrong on the CD player in her room while Paul fried the pancakes in two cast-iron skillets.

"Kevin's sleeping over tonight," Heather said. She'd met him recently. He was a physicist at M.I.T. "I hope that's O.K."

"Sure thing," Paul said. He liked Kevin. He had been coming over often for dinner, and brought beers, and helped with the dishes afterward, talking to Paul as much as he talked to Heather.

"I'm sorry I keep missing him. He seems really nice," Sang said.

"We'll see," Heather said. "Next week is our one-month anniversary."

Sang smiled, as if this modest commemoration were in fact something of much greater significance. "Congratulations."

Heather crossed her fingers. "I guess the next stage is when you assume you're going to spend weekends together."

Paul glanced at Sang, who said nothing. She got up, returning five minutes later from the cellar with a basket full of laundry.

"Nice Jockeys," Heather said, noticing several pairs folded on top of the pile.

"They're Farouk's," Sang said.

"He doesn't have a washing machine?" Heather wanted to know.

"He does," Sang said, oblivious of Heather's disapproving expression. "But it's coin-operated."

The arguments started around Thanksgiving. Paul would hear Sang crying into the phone in her room, the gray plastic cord stretched across the linoleum and then across the landing, disappearing under her door. One of the fights had something to do with a party Sang had been invited to, which Farouk didn't want to attend. Another was about Farouk's birthday. Sang had spent the day before making a cake. The house had smelled of oranges and almonds and Paul had heard the electric beater going late at night. But the next afternoon, he saw the cake in the trash can.

Once, returning from school, he discovered that Farouk was there, the BMW parked outside. It was a painfully cold December day; early that morning, the season's first flakes had fallen. Walking past Sang's room, Paul heard her raised voice. She was accusing: Why didn't he ever want to meet her friends? Why didn't he invite her to his cousin's house for Thanksgiving? Why didn't he like to spend the night together? Why, at the very least, didn't he drive her home?

"I pay for the cabs," Farouk said quietly. "What difference does it make?"

"I hate it, Farouk. It's abnormal."

"You know I don't sleep well when you're there."

"How are we ever going to get married?" she demanded. "Are we supposed to live in separate houses forever?"

"Sang, please," Farouk said. "Try to be calm. Your roommates will hear."

"Will you stop about my roommates," Sang shouted.

"You're hysterical," Farouk said.

She began to cry.

"I've warned you, Sang," Farouk said. He sounded desperate. "I will not spend my life with a woman who makes scenes."

"Fuck you."

Something, a plate or a glass, struck a wall and broke. Then the room went quiet. After much deliberation, Paul knocked softly. No one replied.

A few hours later, Paul nearly bumped into Sang as she was emerging from her bathroom, wrapped in a large dark-pink towel. Her wet hair was uncombed and tangled, a knot bulging like a small nest on one side of her head. For weeks, he had longed to catch a glimpse of her this way, and still he felt wholly unprepared for the vision of her bare legs and arms, her damp face and shoulders.

"Hey," he said, sidling quickly past.

"Paul," she called out after a moment, as if his presence had registered only then. He turned to look at her; though it was barely past four, the sun was already setting in the living-room window, casting a golden patch of light to one side of her in the hallway.

"What's up?" he said.

She crossed her arms in front of her, a hand concealing each shoulder. A spot on her forehead was coated with what appeared to be toothpaste. "I'm sorry about earlier."

"That's O.K."

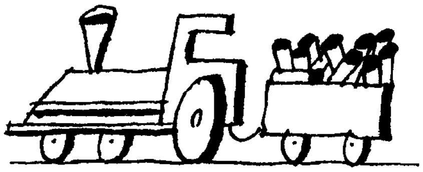
"It's not. You have an exam to study for."

Her eyes were shining brightly, and she had a funny frozen smile on her face, her lips slightly parted. He began to smile back when he saw she was about to cry. He nodded. "It doesn't matter."

For a week, Farouk didn't call, though when the phone rang she flew to answer it. She was home every night for dinner. She had long conversations with her sister in London. "Tell me if you think this is normal," Paul overheard her say as he walked into the kitchen. "We were driving one time and he told me I smelled bad. Sweaty. He told me to wash under my arms. He kept saying it wasn't a criticism, that people in love should be able to say things like that to each other." One day, Charles took Sang out and in the evening she returned, with shopping bags from the outlets in Kittery. Another night, she accepted an invitation to see a movie at the Coolidge with Paul and Heather and Kevin, but once they'd reached the box office she told them she had a headache, and walked back to the house. "I bet you they've split up," Heather said, once they'd settled into their seats.

But, the following week, Farouk called when Sang was at work. Though Farouk hadn't bothered to identify himself, Paul called the bookstore, leaving her the message.

The relationship resumed its course, but Paul noticed that Farouk no longer set foot in the house. He wouldn't even ring the bell. He would pause at the curb, the engine of his car still running, beeping three times to signal that he was waiting for her, and then she would disappear.



Over winter break, she went away, to London. Her sister had had a baby boy recently. Sang showed Paul the things she bought for the baby: playsuits full of snaps, a stuffed octopus, a miniature French-sailor's shirt, a mobile of stars and planets that glowed in the dark. "I'm going to be called Sang Mashi," she told him excitedly, explaining that *mashi* was the Bengali word for aunt. The word sounded strange on her lips. She spoke Bengali infrequently—never to her sister, never to her suitors, only a word here and there to her parents, in Michigan, to whom she spoke on weekends.

"How do you say 'bon voyage'?" Paul asked.

She told him she wasn't sure.

Without her there, it was easier for Paul to study, his mind spacious and clear. His exam was less than six months away. A date and time had been scheduled, the first Tuesday in May, at ten o'clock, marked with an "X" on the calendar over his desk. Since summer, he had worked his way, yet again, through the list of poems and critical essays and plays, typing summaries of them into his computer. He had printed out these summaries, three-hole-punched them, put them in a series of binders. He wrote further summaries of the summaries on index cards that he reviewed before bed, filed in shoe boxes. For Christmas, he was invited to an aunt's house in Buffalo, as usual. This year, with his exam as an excuse, he declined the invitation, mailing off gifts. Heather was away, too; she and Kevin had gone skiing in Vermont.

To mark the new year, Paul set up a new routine, spreading himself all over the house. In the mornings, he reviewed poetry at the kitchen table. After lunch, criticism in the living room. A Shakespeare play before bed. He began to leave his things, his binders and his shoe boxes and his books, on the kitchen table, on certain steps of the staircase, on the coffee table in the living room. He was slouched in the papasan chair one snowy afternoon, reading his notes on Aristotle's Poetics, when the doorbell rang. It was a U.P.S. man with a package for Sang, something from J.Crew. Paul signed for it and took it upstairs. He leaned it against the door of her room, which caused the door to open slightly. He closed it firmly, and for a moment he stood there, his hand still on the knob. Even though she was in London, he knocked before entering. The futon was neatly made, a red batik bedspread covering the top. The green walls were bare but for two framed Indian miniatures of palace scenes, men smoking hookahs and reclining on cushions, bare-bellied women dancing in a ring. There was none of the disarray he for some reason pictured every time he walked by her room; only outside, through the windows, was there the silent chaos of the storm. The snow fell in disorderly swirls, yet it covered the brown porch railing below, neatly, as if it were a painted trim. A single panel of a white seersucker curtain was loosely cinched with a peach silk scarf that Sang sometimes knotted at her throat, causing the fabric of the curtain to gather in the shape of a slim hourglass. Paul untied the scarf, letting the curtain cover the window pane. Without touching his face to the scarf, he smelled the perfume that lingered in its weave. He went to the futon and sat down, his legs extending along the oatmeal carpet. He took off his shoes and socks. On a wine crate next to the futon was a glass of water that had gathered bubbles, a small pot of Vaseline. He undid his belt buckle but suddenly the desire left him, absent from his body just as she was absent from the room. He buckled his belt again, and then slowly he lifted the bedspread. The sheets were flannel, blue and white, a pattern of fleur-de-lis.

He had drifted off to sleep when he heard the phone ring. He stumbled barefoot out of Sang's room, into the kitchen, the linoleum chilly.

"Hello?"

No one replied on the other end, and he was about to hang up when he heard a dog barking.

"Hello?" he repeated. It occurred to him it might be Sang, a poor connection from London. "Sang, is that you?"

The caller hung up.

That evening, after dinner, the phone rang again. When he picked it up he heard the same dog he'd heard earlier.

"Balthazar, shush!" a woman said, as soon as Paul said hello. Her voice was hesitant. Was Sang in, she wanted to know.

"She's not here. May I take a message?"

She left her name, Deirdre Frain, and a telephone number. Paul wrote it down on the message pad, under Partha Mazoomdar, a suitor who'd called from Cleveland in the morning.

The next day, Deirdre called again. Again Paul told her Sang wasn't there, adding that she wouldn't be back until the weekend.

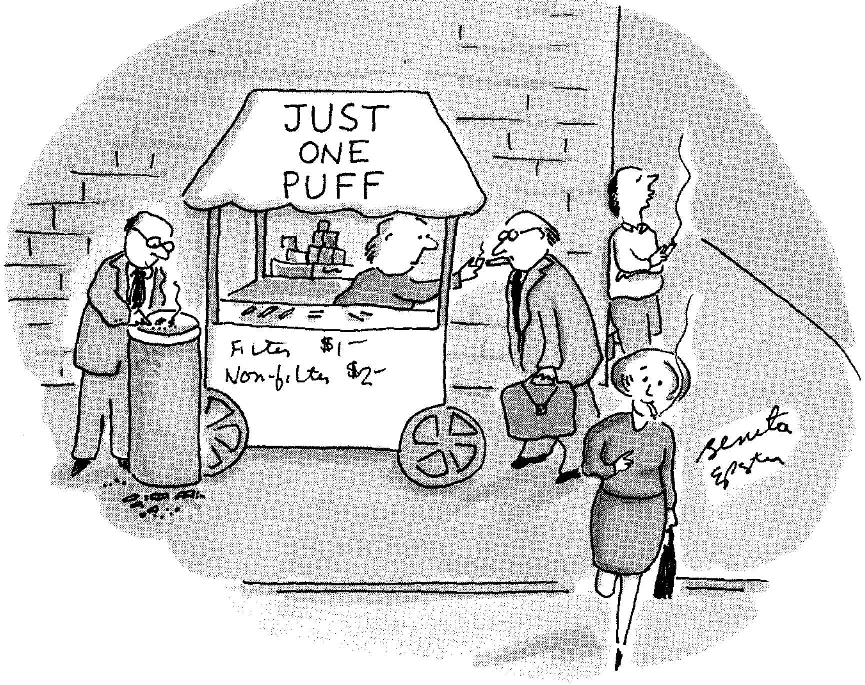
"Where is she?" Deirdre asked.

"She's out of the country."

"In Cairo?"

This took him by surprise. "No, London."

"In London," she repeated. She


JUST ONE PUFF
Filter $1—
Non-filter $2—
Benita Epstein

sounded relieved. “London. O.K. Thanks.”

The fourth call was very late at night, when Paul was already in bed. He went downstairs, feeling for the phone in the dark.

“It's Deirdre.” She sounded slightly out of breath, as if it were she, not he, who'd just rushed to the phone.

He flicked on the light switch, rubbing his eyes behind his glasses. “Um, as I said, Sang's *not* back yet.”

“I don't want to talk to Sang.” She was slurring her words, exaggerating the pronunciation of Sang's name in a slightly cruel way.

Paul heard music, a trumpet crooning softly. “You don't?”

“No,” she said. “Actually, I have a question.”

“A question?”

“Yes.” There was a pause, the clink of an ice cube falling into a glass. Her tone had become flirtatious. “So, what's your name?”

He took off his glasses, allowing the room to go blurry. He couldn't recall the last time a woman had spoken to him that way. “Paul.”

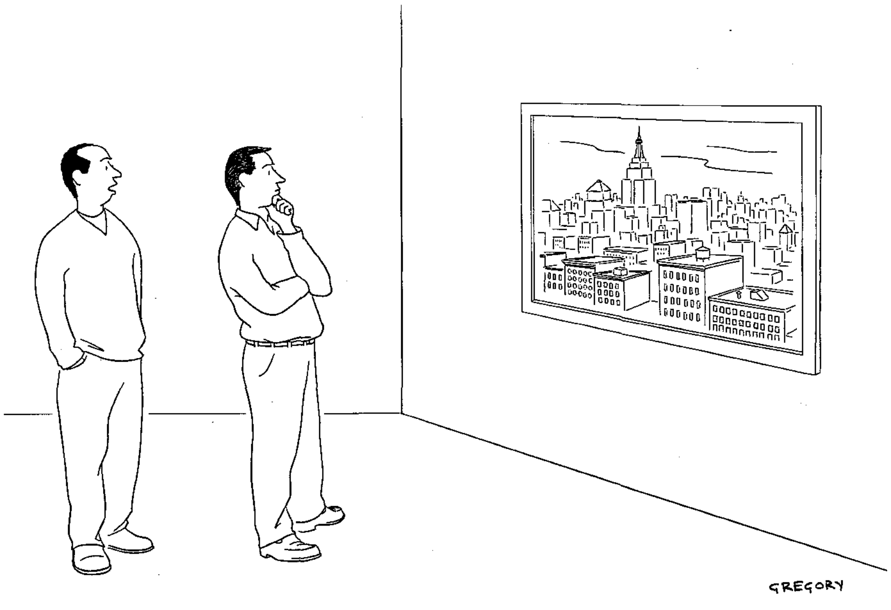
“Paul,” she repeated. “Can I ask you another question, Paul?”

“What?”

“It's about Sang.”

He stiffened. Again, she had said the name without kindness. “What about Sang?”

Deirdre paused. “She's your housemate, right?”



“It's not high-definition anything. It's a window.”

“That's right.”

“Well, I was wondering, then, if you'd know if—are they cousins?”

“Who?”

“Sang and Freddy.”

He put his glasses on again, drawing things into focus. He was unnerved by this woman's curiosity. It wasn't her business, he wanted to tell her. But before he could do that, Deirdre began quietly crying.

He looked at the clock on the stove; it was close to three in the morning. It was his own fault. He shouldn't have answered the phone so late. He wished he hadn't told the woman his name.

“Deirdre,” he said after a while, tired of listening to her. “Are you still there?”

She stopped crying. Her breathing was uneven, penetrating his ear.

“I don't know who you are,” Paul said. “I don't understand why you're calling me.”

“I love him.”

He hung up, his heart hammering. He had the urge to take a shower. He wanted to erase her name from the legal pad. He stared at the receiver, remnants of Sang's mole-colored fingerprints still visible here and there. For the first time since the winter break had begun, he felt lonely in the house. The call had to be a fluke. Some other Sang the woman was referring to. Maybe it was a scheme on behalf of one of her Indian suitors, to cast suspicion, to woo her away from Farouk. Before Sang had left for London, the fights had subsided, and things between Sang and Farouk, as far as Paul could tell, were still the same. In the living room, she'd been wrapping a brown leather satchel, a pair of men's driving gloves. The night before she'd left, she'd made a dinner reservation for the two of them at Biba. Farouk had driven her to the airport.

The ringing of the phone woke Paul the next morning. He remained in bed, listening to it, looking at the ashen branches of the tree outside his window. He counted twelve rings before they stopped. The phone rang half an hour later, and he ignored it again. The third time, he was in the kitchen. When it stopped, he unplugged the cord from the jack.

Though he studied in silence for the remainder of the day, he felt fitful. Sitting in the kitchen that evening with a bricklike volume of Spenser, he was unable to concentrate on the lines, irritated by the footnotes, by how much there was left to learn. He wondered how many times Deirdre had tried to call him since he'd unplugged the phone. Had she given up? The calling felt obsessive to him, unhinged. He wondered whether she was the type to do something. To take a bottle of pills.

After dinner, he plugged the phone back into the jack. There were no further calls. And yet his mind continued to wander. Something told him that she'd try again. He'd made the mistake of telling her when Sang would be back. Perhaps Deirdre was waiting to speak to her directly. Perhaps Deirdre would tell Sang the same thing she'd told him, about loving Farouk. Before going to bed, he poured himself a glass of Dewar's, a gift sent by his aunt in Buffalo. Then he dialled the number Deirdre had given him. She picked up right away, with a lilting hello.

“Deirdre, it's Paul.”

“Paul,” she said, slowly.

“You called me last night. I'm Sang's housemate.”

“Of course. Paul. You hung up on me, Paul.” She appeared to be drunk again, but in a sunnier mood.

“Listen, I'm sorry about that. I just wanted to make sure you were O.K.”

Deirdre sighed. “That's sweet of you, Paul.”

“And to ask you to please stop calling me," he said after a considerable pause.

"Why?" There was panic in her voice.

"Because I don't know you," he said.

"Would you like to know me, Paul?" she said. "I'm a very likable person."

"I have to go," he said firmly, hoping not to provoke her. "But maybe there's someone else you could talk to? A friend?"

"Freddy's my friend."

The mention of Farouk, the use of the nickname, unsettled Paul as it had the night before. Yesterday, he'd surmised that Deirdre might be a student of Farouk's at Harvard, practically a teenager, infatuated with an older man. He imagined her sitting at the back of a lecture hall, visiting him in his office, getting the wrong idea. Now a simple, reasonable question, which was at the same time a poisoned question, formed in Paul's mind.

"So, how exactly do you know Farouk?" Paul asked lightly, as if they were chatting at a party.

He didn't think she'd tell him, thought she might even hang up on him as he had on her, but they slipped easily into a conversation. It was Deirdre who did most of the talking. She told Paul that she was from Vancouver originally, and that she'd moved to Boston in her twenties, to study interior design. She'd met Farouk one Sunday afternoon, a year and a half ago, when she was walking out of a café in the South End. He had followed her halfway down the block, tapped her on the shoulder, looked her up and down with unconcealed desire. "You can't imagine," Deirdre said, remembering it. "You can't imagine how something like that feels." Nevertheless, he'd been gentlemanly. For their first date, they had gone to Walden Pond. Afterward, they had bought corn and tomatoes, and grilled salmon in her back yard. Farouk loved her home, an old farmhouse on five acres. He had asked her to draw up the plans for redoing his kitchen. On Labor Day, they had hiked Mt. Sunapee together. She said other things Paul listened to, unsure of how much he should believe. For either they were true, and Farouk and Deirdre were having a full-blown affair, or Deirdre was simply inventing it all, the way lonely, drunk people sometimes invent things. At one point, he wandered into the hallway and opened Sang's door, making sure the curtain was tied as he'd remembered it.

"What about you?" Deirdre asked suddenly.

"What about me?"

"Well, here I am going on and you haven't said a thing. What are you like, Paul? Are you happy?"

He had sacrificed an hour to this woman. The edge of his ear ached from pressing the phone to it for so long. "This isn't about me." He swallowed, shutting the door to Sang's room. "It's about Sang."

"They're cousins, right?" Deirdre said. He could barely hear her. "Aren't they?"

The desperation with which she asked him brought with it a crushing certainty. He knew that all she had told him was true, the knowledge of something having gone terribly wrong levelling him the way his exam had. The way Theresa's words had.

"Sang and Farouk are not cousins," he said. He felt a strange, inward power as he spoke, aware that the information could devastate her.

She was silent.

"They're boyfriend and girlfriend, Deirdre," he said. "A serious couple."

"Oh, yeah?" Her tone was challenging. "How serious?"

He thought for a moment. "They see each other four or five nights a week."

"They do?" To Paul's satisfaction, Deirdre sounded wounded by this information.

"Yes," he said, adding, "they've been together for over three years."

"Three?" The word trailed off weakly, in a way that made Paul wonder if she might cry again. But when she spoke next her voice was clear. "Well, we're a serious couple, too. I picked him up from the airport yesterday when he came back from Cairo. I saw him tonight. He was here for dinner, here in my house. He made love to me on my staircase, Paul. An hour ago, I could still feel him dripping down my thighs."

Sang returned from London with presents for the house, KitKats in red wrappers, tea from Harrods, marmalade, chocolate-coated biscuits. A snapshot of her nephew went up on the refrig-

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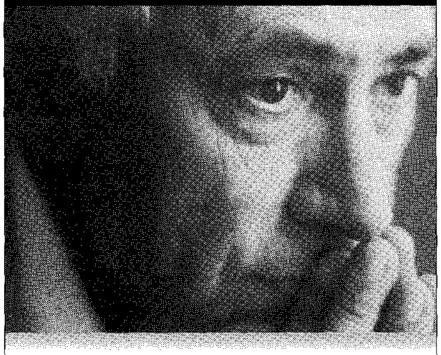

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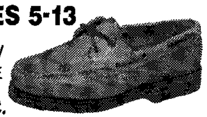

erator, his small smiling face pressed against Sang's. Paul, from his room, saw that it was Farouk who dropped her off at the house. Eventually, Paul had gone downstairs, down the magnificent staircase which he was now unable to descend without a fleeting image of Farouk naked on top of a woman who was not Sang. In the kitchen he opened his cupboard and pulled down the Dewar's.

"Wow. Things have really changed around here," Sang said, smiling, her eyebrows raised in amusement, watching him pour the drink.

"What do you mean?"

"You're drinking Scotch. If I'd known, I would have bought you some single malt in duty-free, instead of the KitKats."

The thought of her buying him a gift depressed him. They were friendly, but they were not friends. He offered her a glass of the Scotch, which she accepted. They sat together at the table. She clinked her glass against his.

She began sorting through the mail Paul had collected for her. Her hair was a few inches shorter; she smelled intensely of a spicy perfume.

"I don't know any Deirdres," she said, reading her messages on the legal pad. "Did she say why she was calling?"

He'd drained his glass, and was already pacified by the drink. He shook his head.

"I wonder what I should do."

"About what?"

"Well, should I call her back?"

He stood up and opened the freezer to get ice cubes for a second drink. When he returned to the table, she was crossing out the name with a pencil. "Forget it. She's probably a telemarketer or something."

Avoiding Sang was easy. The university library, which Paul normally found so charmless, with its cement floors and gray metal shelves and carrels full of anonymous ball-point philosophy, was where he began to spend his days. At home, he discovered that it was just as easy to take a sandwich up to his room. Winter gave way to a wet, reluctant spring, full of wind and slanted rains that lashed the window by Paul's bed. Whenever the phone rang, he didn't answer. In the first few days after Sang's return, he'd been convinced, each time, that it would be Deirdre, demanding to talk to Sang. But Deirdre never called. He waited for her voice, the things she had told him, to fade from his memory. But the conversations had lodged themselves stubbornly in his mind, alongside all the plays and poems and essays. He saw two people swimming in Walden Pond, their heads above the surface of the water. But then there was Sang, day after day, disappearing to eat dinner at Farouk's. There she was, sitting at the kitchen table, booking Farouk's tickets to Cairo for the summer, his credit-card number written on a sheet of paper. After two months, Deirdre still hadn't called, and Paul finally stopped fearing that she would.

Paul took the week of his spring break off from studying. "Stop cramming. That's probably what happened the first time. Go to the Caribbean," his adviser suggested. Instead, Paul stayed at home, but declared himself officially on vacation. He went to movies at the Brattle, spent two days making a cassoulet. He drove to Wellfleet one day, forcing himself not to take a book. He decided to ride out to Concord on his bike, to see Emerson's house; on Saturday morning, he discovered that the chain needed to be fixed, and he brought the bike up to the deck. When he looked up, Sang was standing there, the phone in her hands, the cord stretched as far as it could go.

"Something weird just happened," she said.

"What?"

"It was that Deirdre woman. The one you took the message from when I was away."

Paul bent down, pretending to root around for something in his tool box. "She was asking for Farouk," Sang continued. "She says she's a friend of his, visiting from out of town."

"Oh. So that must have been why she was calling," he said, relieved to hear that this was all Deirdre had said.

"He's never mentioned a Deirdre."

"Oh."

Sang sat down in a beach chair, the phone in her lap, her body leaning into it. She straightened, staring at the phone, pressing numbers at random without picking up the receiver. "Farouk doesn't have any friends," she said. "Ever since I've known him, he's never introduced me to a single friend. I'm his only friend, really." She looked intently at Paul, and for a second he feared she was about to draw some sort of parallel, point out that Paul didn't have friends, either. Instead, she said, "How did she get my number, anyway?"

She'd looked it up in Farouk's address book; Deirdre had confessed this to Paul. Farouk had made it easy for her, writing it under "S" for Sang, the name of the cousin he had mentioned in a way that had made her suspicious. Paul shook his head, standing up, squeezing the hand brakes on the bicycle. "Don't know. I guess I'd ask Farouk."

"Right. Ask Farouk." She stood up and went back into the house.

That evening, when Paul returned from Concord, he found Sang at the kitchen table. She said nothing as he went to the refrigerator to pull out the remains of the cassoulet.

"Farouk isn't in," she said, as if responding to a question on Paul's part. "He hasn't been in all day."

He lifted the lid of the baking dish and sprinkled a few drops of water on top of the cassoulet. "You want some of this?"

"No, thanks." She was frowning.

Paul put the cassoulet in the oven, and poured a Scotch. The muscles in his arms and his thighs ached pleasantly. He wanted to take a shower before eating.

"So, when exactly did this Deirdre person call?" Sang said, stopping him as he walked out of the kitchen.

He turned to face her, pivoting on his heels. "I don't remember. It was when you were away."

"And did she say anything to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What did she say to you, exactly?"

"Nothing. I didn't talk to her," he said, his pulse racing; he was thankful that he was already coated with sweat. "She just wanted you to call her back."

"Well, I can't call her back. She didn't even leave her number. It was weird. Did she sound like a weird sort of person to you?"

He remembered Deirdre's tears. "I love him," she'd told Paul, a perfect stranger. He looked at Sang, manipulating his face into an uncomprehending expression. "I'm not sure what you mean."

She sighed impatiently. "Can you

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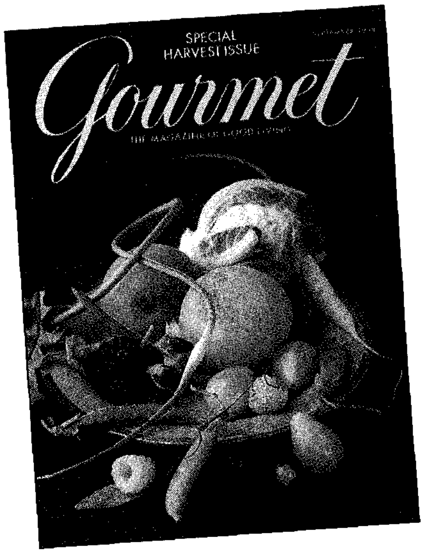


hand me that?" she said, pointing to the message pad.

Paul watched as Sang began flipping through the pages that had been turned over, running her finger down each line.

"What are you looking for?" he said after a moment.

"Her number."

"Why?"

"I want to call her back."

"Why?"

She looked up at him, exasperated. "Because I want to, Paul. Is that O.K. with you?"

He went upstairs to take his shower. It wasn't his business, he told himself as the hot water washed over him, and, later, as he dried himself, then combed back his hair, enveloped in steam. When he came downstairs again, he found her on her hands and knees, going through the recycling bin, newspapers and magazines piled around her.

"Damn it," she said.

"Now what are you looking for?"

"The number. I remember ripping out that page for some reason. I think I threw it away." She began to put the newspapers and magazines back into the bin. "Damn it," she said again. She stood up, kicking the bin lightly with her foot. "I don't even remember her last name. Do you?"

He inhaled, as if to seal the information inside himself, but then he shook his head, relieved at the opportunity, at last, to be honest with her. He, too, had forgotten Deirdre's last name. It had been a name of one syllable, but apart from that detail it had vanished from his brain.

"Hey, Paul," Sang said after a moment. "Are you O.K.? I'm sorry if I sounded harsh back then."

He walked across the kitchen, opened the oven. "Don't worry about it."

Her stomach growled, loudly enough for Paul to hear. "God, I just realized I haven't eaten a thing today. I think I'll have some of that cassoulet, after all. Should I make a salad?" This would be their first dinner together, alone, without Heather. He used to yearn for such an occasion. He used to feel clumsy and tongue-tied when Sang was in the room. Now he felt dread.

"I guess she was a little weird," he said slowly, gazing at the back of Sang's head, bent forward over the sink where she was ripping lettuce. She turned around.

"How? How did she seem weird to you?"

He was so nervous that for a terrible instant he worried that he might laugh out loud. Sang was regarding him steadily. The faucet was still running. She reached back to turn it off, and now the room was silent.

"She was crying," he said.

"Crying?"

"Um—yeah."

"Crying how?"

"Just—crying. Like she was upset about something."

Sang opened her mouth, as if to speak, but for a while it simply hung open. "So let me get this straight. This woman Deirdre called and asked for me."

Paul nodded. "Right."

"And you said I wasn't there."

"Right."

"And then she asked you to have me call her back."

"Right."

"And then she started crying?"

"Yeah."

"And then what happened?"

"That was it. Then she hung up."

For a moment, Sang seemed satisfied with the information, nodding slowly. Then she shook her head abruptly, as if to flick it away. "Why didn't you tell me this?"

He regretted having offered her the cassoulet. He regretted having ever picked up the phone that day. He regretted that Sang and not another person had moved into the room, into his house, into his life. "I did," he said calmly, drawing a line between them in his mind. "I told you she called."

"But you didn't tell me this."

"No."

She opened her eyes wide, incredulous. "Didn't it occur to you I might want to know?"

He curled his lips together, looking away.

"Well?" she demanded, shouting at him now. "Didn't it?"

When he still did not reply, she marched up to him, her hands clenched in fists, and he braced himself for a blow, twisting his face to one side. But she didn't strike him. Instead she gripped the sides of her own head, as if to steady herself. "My God, Paul." Her voice was so shrill it was nearly inaudible. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Now it was she who began to avoid him. For a few nights, she was not at home. Paul saw her getting into Charles's truck with a weekend bag. Because Heather had by then all but officially moved in with Kevin, once again Paul found himself alone in the house. A week passed before he saw Sang again. Thinking himself alone, he hadn't bothered to shut his door. She came up to his room, wearing a pretty dress he'd never seen, a white cotton short-sleeved dress, fitted at the waist. The neck was square, showing off her collarbones.

"Hey," she said.

"Hey." He had not missed her at all.

"Look. I just wanted to tell you that it's all a huge confusion. Deirdre really is an old friend of Farouk's, from way back. From college."

"You don't have to explain it to me," Paul said.

"She lives in Canada." Sang continued. "In Vancouver."

"I see."

"They talk, like, once a year. Farouk mentioned my name to her years ago, when we first got together, when he lived in another apartment, and she remembered it. She was trying to get in touch with him because she's getting married, and she wanted to send Farouk an invitation. She didn't have Farouk's new address or his number, and he's not listed. That's why she tried here."

She seemed strangely flattered, excited by her absurd explanation. Some color had come to her cheeks.

"There's only one thing, Paul."

He looked up. "What's that?"

"Farouk called Deirdre to ask about what you said."

"What I said?"

"About the crying." Sang shrugged her shoulders, dropped them carelessly. "He told me she has no idea what you were talking about." Her voice sounded compressed, the words running together quickly.

"Are you saying I made it up?"

She was silent.

For her sake, he'd told her about the crying. That night in the kitchen, watching her make the salad, he'd felt the walls collapsing around her. He'd wanted to warn her somehow. Now he wanted to push her from the door frame where she stood.

"Why would I make up a story like that?" He could feel a nerve on one side of his head throbbing.

Instead of arguing with him, she gave a sympathetic glance, letting her head rest against the door frame. "I don't know, Paul." It occurred to him that this was the first time she'd visited him in his room. For a moment, she appeared to be searching for a free place to sit. She straightened her head.

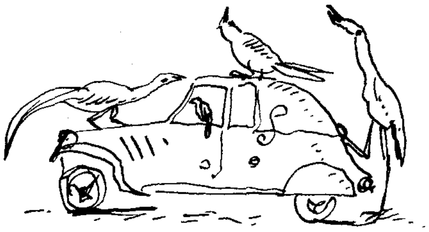
"Did you really think it would make me leave him?"

"I didn't think it would make you do anything," Paul said. He was clenching his teeth now. His body felt heavy from her accusation, numb. "I didn't make it up."

"I mean, it's one thing for you to like me, Paul," she continued. "It's one thing for you to have a crush. But to make up a story like that—" She stopped, her mouth now straining into something that was not a smile. "It's pathetic, really. Pathetic!" And she walked out of the room.

When they crossed paths again, she didn't apologize for the outburst. She didn't appear angry, only indifferent. He noticed that a copy of the *Phoenix*, which she'd left on top of the microwave, was folded to the real-estate section, and that a few of the listings were circled. She came and went from Farouk's. She looked up at Paul briefly when she happened to see him, with a mechanical little smile, and then she looked away, as if he were invisible.

The next time Sang worked at the bookstore, Paul stayed up in his room until he heard her leave the house. Once she was gone, he went to the kitchen, emptying out the recycling bin, which had not been taken out all winter. He flipped though each magazine, unfolded every newspaper, searching for the sheet of paper with Deirdre's number. It would be like Sang, he thought, to look for it and not find it. But Paul couldn't find it, either. He pulled out the White Pages and opened it at random, searching for a Deirdre, not caring how ridiculous he was being. Then he remembered it. Her last name. It swam effortlessly back to his memory, accompanied by the sound of Deirdre's voice as she introduced herself to him that night on the telephone months ago. He turned to the "F"s, saw it there, a D. Frain, an address in Belmont. He dragged the nail of his index finger beneath the listing, leaving a faint dent in the paper.



He called the next day. He left a message on her machine, asking her to call him back. He felt giddy, having done it. In a way, it was his fear that Deirdre would not call him back, knowing that she, too, was now keeping her distance, that emboldened him to keep calling, to keep leaving messages. "Deirdre, this is Paul. Please call me," he said each time.

And then one day she picked up the phone.

"I need to talk to you," he said.

She recognized his voice. "I know. Listen, Paul—"

He cut her off. "It's not right," he said. He was sitting in a booth in the lobby of the library, watching as students flashed their ID cards to the security guard. He fished in his pocket for extra quarters. "I listened to you. I was kind to you. I didn't have to talk to you."

"I know. I'm sorry. It was wrong of me." She no longer sounded drunk or flirtatious or desperate or upset in any way. She was perfectly ordinary, polite but removed.

"I didn't even tell her the other stuff you told me." He saw that a student was standing outside the booth, waiting for him to finish. Paul lowered his voice. He felt mildly hysterical. "Remember all that stuff?"

"Look, please, I said I'm sorry. Can you hold on a second?" Paul heard a doorbell ring. After a minute, she came back to the phone. "I have to go now. I'll call you back."

"When?" Paul demanded, afraid that she was lying to him, that it was a ploy to be rid of him. In January, when Paul had wanted to get off the phone with

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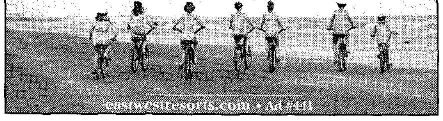

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Deirdre, she had pleaded with him to stay on the line.

"Later. Tonight," she said.

"I want to know when."

She told him she'd call at ten.

The idea came to him immediately after getting off the phone, the receiver still in his hand. He left the library, went to the nearest RadioShack. "I need a phone," he told the salesman. "And an adapter with two jacks."

It was a night Sang worked at the bookstore; as usual, she was home by nine. She said nothing to Paul when she came into the kitchen to get her mail.

"I called Deirdre," Paul said.

"Why don't you stop involving yourself this way?" Sang said evenly, leafing through a catalogue.

"She's calling me at ten o'clock," Paul said. "If you want, you can listen in without her knowing. I got another phone and hooked it up to our line."

She dropped the catalogue, noticing the second phone. "Jesus, Paul," she hissed. "I can't fucking believe you."

She went into her room; at five to ten she came out, and sat next to Paul. He'd set the phones together on the table. At exactly one minute past ten, both phones rang. Paul picked up one. "Hello?"

"It's me," Deirdre said.

He nodded, motioning to Sang, and slowly, carefully, Sang picked up the other phone and put it to her ear without allowing it to touch her. She held it unnaturally, the bottom of the receiver turned away from her mouth, pointed toward her shoulder.

"Like I said, Paul, I'm sorry for calling you. I shouldn't have," Deirdre said.

She seemed relaxed, willing to talk, in no apparent rush. Paul relaxed a little, too. "But you did."

"Yes."

"And you cried about Farouk."

"Yes."

"And then you made me into a liar."

She was silent.

"You denied the whole thing."

"It was Freddy's idea."

"And you went along with it," Paul said. He was looking at Sang. She was pressing her top teeth into her lower lip in a way that looked painful.

"What was I supposed to do, Paul?" Deirdre said. "He was furious when he found out I'd called you. He refused to see me. He unplugged his phone. He wouldn't answer the door."

Sang put a palm against the table's edge, as if to push it away, but she ended up pushing herself back in her chair, scraping the linoleum. Paul put a finger to his lips, but then he realized that, to Deirdre, it was he who'd made the sound. She kept talking.

"Listen, Paul, I'm sorry you're in the middle of all this. I really am sorry I called. It was just that Freddy kept telling me Sang was his cousin, and when I asked him to introduce me to her he refused. I didn't care at first. I figured I wasn't the only woman in his life. But then I fell in love with him." She wanted to believe him, she explained. She was a thirty-five-year-old woman, already married and divorced. She didn't have time for this.

"But I've ended it," she said, matter-of-factly. "You know, there was a point when I actually believed he couldn't live without me. That's what he does to women. He depends on them. He asks them to do a hundred things, makes them believe his life won't function without them. That was him this afternoon when you called, still wanting to see me, still wanting to keep me on the side. He doesn't have any friends, you see. Only lovers. I think he needs them, the way other people need a family or friends." She sounded reasonable and reflective now, as if she were describing an affair she'd had years before. Sang's eyes were closed and she was shaking her head slowly from side to side. The dog was barking.

"That's my dog," Deirdre said. "He's always hated Freddy. He's the size of a football, but every time Freddy comes over he makes me put a guardrail across the stairs."

Sang inhaled sharply. She put the receiver down quietly on the table, then she picked it up again.

"I should go," Paul said.

"Me, too," Deirdre agreed. "I think you need to tell her now."

He was startled, afraid Deirdre had discovered his trick, that she knew that Sang was listening in. "Tell her what?"

"Tell her about me and Farouk. She deserves to know. It sounds like you're a good friend of hers."

Deirdre hung up, and for a long time Paul and Sang sat there, listening to the silence. He had cleared himself with

Sang, and yet he felt no relief, no vindication. Eventually, Sang hung up her phone and stood up, slowly, but made no further movements. She looked sealed off from things, holding herself as if she still needed to be perfectly stealthy, as if the slightest sound or gesture would betray her presence.

"I'm sorry," Paul said finally.

She nodded and went to her room, shutting the door. After a while he followed her, stood outside. "Sang? Do you need anything?"

He remained there, waiting for her to reply. He heard her moving around the room. When the door opened, he saw that she had changed, into a black top with long tight-fitting sleeves. Her pink raincoat was draped over her arm, her purse hanging over her shoulder. "I need a ride."

In the car, she directed him, saying what to do and where to turn only at the last possible minute. They drove through Allston and down Storrow Drive. "There," she said, pointing. It was an ugly high-rise, bereft of charm and yet clearly exclusive, on the Cambridge side of the river. She got out of the car and started walking.

Paul followed her. "What are you doing?"

She speeded up. "I need to talk to him." She spoke in a monotone.

"I don't know, Sang."

She walked even faster, her shoes clicking on the pavement.

The lobby was filled with beige sofas and potted trees. There was an African doorman sitting at the desk who smiled at them, recognizing Sang. He was listening to a radio tuned to the news in French.

"Evening, Miss."

"Hello, Raymond."

"Getting cold again, Miss. Maybe rain later."

"Maybe."

She kept her finger pressed on the elevator button until it came, while she fixed her hair in the mirror opposite. On the tenth floor, they stopped, then walked to the end of the hallway. The doors were dark brown, thickly varnished. She tapped the door knocker, which was like a small brass picture frame hinged to the surface. Inside, there was the sound of a television. Then there was silence.

"It's me," she said.

She tapped it again. Five consecutive taps. Ten. She pressed the top of her head against the door. "I heard her, Farouk. I heard Deirdre. She called Paul, and I heard her." Sang's voice was quavering.

"Please open the door." She tried the knob, a strong metal knob, which would not budge.

There were footsteps, a chain being undone. Farouk opened the door, a day's stubble on his face. He wore a flecked fisherman's sweater, corduroy pants, black espadrilles on bare feet. He looked nothing like a philanderer, just bookish and slight. "I did not invite you here," he said acidly when he saw Paul.

In spite of all he knew, Paul was stung by the words, unable to speak in his own defense.

"Please leave," Farouk said. "Please, for once, try to respect our privacy."

"She asked me," Paul said.

Farouk lurched forward, arms extended rigidly in front of him, pushing Paul away as if he were a large piece of furniture. Paul took a step back, then resisted, grabbing Farouk's wrists. The two men fell to the floor of the hallway, Paul's glasses flying onto the carpet. It was easy for Paul to pin Farouk to the ground, to dig his fingers into his shoulders. Paul squeezed them tightly, through the thick wool of the sweater, feeling the give of the tendons, aware that Farouk was no longer resisting. For a moment, Paul lay on top of him fully, subduing him like a lover. He looked up, searching for Sang, but she was nowhere. He looked back at the man beneath him, a man he barely knew, a man he hated. "All she wants is for you to admit it," Paul said. "I think you owe her that."

Farouk spat at Paul's face, a cold spray that made Paul recoil. Farouk pushed him off, went into his apartment and slammed the door. Other doors along the hallway began to open. Paul could hear Farouk fastening the chain. He found his glasses and stood up, pressed his ear to the varnished wood. He heard crying, then a series of objects falling. At one point he could hear Farouk saying, "Stop it, please, please, it's not as bad as you think." And then Sang saying, "How many times? How many times did you do it? Did you do it here on the bed?"

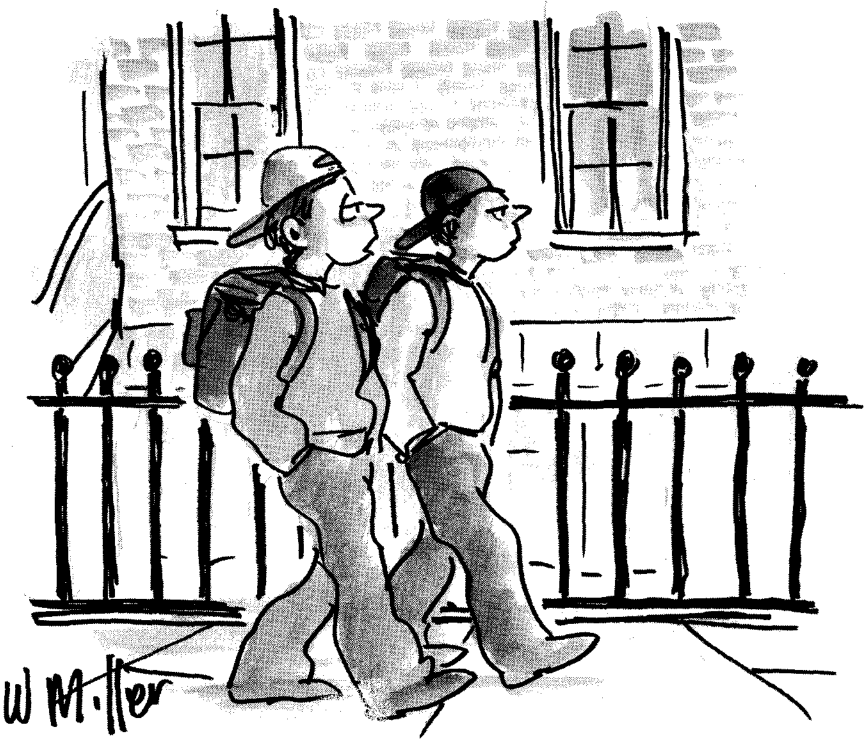
A minute later, the elevator opened and a man walked toward Farouk's apartment. He was a lean man with gray hair and a big bunch of keys in his hand. "I'm the super in this building. Who are you?" he asked Paul.

"I live with the woman inside," he said, pointing at Farouk's door.

"You her husband?"

"No."

The super knocked on the door, say-



"That old fifteen-minutes-of-fame thing—that's from the Bible, isn't it?"

ing neighbors had complained. He continued to knock, rapping the wood with his knuckles until the door opened.

Inside was a hallway illuminated by track lights. Paul glimpsed a bright white kitchen without windows, a stack of cookbooks on the counter. To the right was a dining room, painted the same sage green as Sang's room. Paul followed the super into the living room. There was an off-white sofa, a coffee table, a sliding glass door that led to a balcony. In the distance was a view of the Citgo sign, draining and filling with color. There was a bookcase along one wall which had fallen to the floor, its books in a heap. The receiver of a telephone on a side table hung from a cord, beeping faintly, repeatedly. In spite of these things, the room had a barren quality, as if someone were in the process of moving out of it.

Sang was kneeling on an Oriental carpet, picking up the pieces of what appeared to have been a clear glass vase. She was shivering. Her hair was undone, hanging toward the floor, partly shielding her face. There was water everywhere, and the ruins of a bouquet of flowers, irises and tiger lilies and daffodils. She worked carefully with the glass, creating a pile of shards on the coffee table. There were petals in her hair and stuck to her face and neck, and plastered to the skin exposed above her black scoop-necked top, as if she had smeared them on herself like a cream. There were welts emerging above her neckline, fresh and bright.

The men stood there, looking at her, none of them saying anything. A policeman arrived, his black boots and his gun and his radio filling up the room, static from his radio replacing the silence. Someone in the building had called the station to complain, he said. He asked Sang, who was still on the floor, if Farouk had struck her. Sang shook her head.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"I painted the walls," Sang said, as if that would explain everything. Paul remembered her painting her own room, barefoot, listening to Billie Holiday.

The policeman leaned over, inspecting the broken glass and flower debris on the carpet, noticing the welts on her skin. "What happened?"

"I bought them," she said, tears streaming quickly down her cheeks. Her voice was thick, ashamed. "I did this to myself."

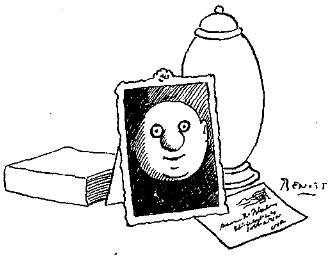
After that, everything proceeded in an orderly way, with people moving in separate directions, not reacting to anyone else. The policeman filled out a form, then lent an arm and took Sang to the bathroom. The super left, saying something to Farouk about a fine. Farouk went to the kitchen, returning with a roll of paper towels and a garbage bag, and knelt by the carpet, cleaning up the mess Sang had made. The policeman looked at Paul, as if assessing him for the first time. He asked if Paul was an involved party.

"I'm her housemate," Paul replied. "I just gave her a ride."

The next morning, Paul was awakened by the noise of a car door closing. He went to the window and saw the trunk of a taxi being pressed down by the driver's hand. Sang had left a note on the kitchen table: she was going to London to visit her sister. Paul, thanks for yesterday, it said. Along with this was a signed check for her portion of the rent.

For a few days, nothing happened. He collected her mail. The bookstore called to ask where she was. Paul told them she had the flu. Two weeks later, the bookstore called again. This time it was to fire her. The third week, Farouk began to call, asking to speak to her. He didn't identify himself, didn't press Paul when he said, night after night, "Sang's not in." He was polite to Paul, in a way he had never been before, saying thank you, that he'd try later. Paul relished these calls. He liked depriving Farouk of the knowledge of where Sang was. But then, one day when he called, Heather, holed up in the house that week to study for an exam, happened to answer and said, "She's left the country," putting an end to Farouk's calls.

At the end of the month, the rent was due. Paul and Heather didn't have enough to cover it. Instead of contacting Sang's parents, he looked up her sister's phone number in London on an old telephone bill. A woman answered, who sounded just like her.



"Sang?"

The phone switched hands, and a man came on the line. "Who is this?"

"This is her housemate in America, in Brookline. Paul. I'm trying to reach Sang."

There was a long pause. After some minutes had passed, he wondered if he ought to hang up and try again. But then the man picked up the phone. He didn't apologize for the delay. "She's indisposed at the moment. I'm sure she'll appreciate your call."

Charles came that weekend to pack up Sang's things. He tossed her clothes into garbage bags, stripped the futon of its sheets, and asked Paul to help him put it out on the sidewalk. Wrapping the framed Indian miniatures in newspaper at the kitchen table, he told Paul he'd talked to Sang on the phone, said that she'd be living in London with her sister though the summer. "You know, I kept telling her to leave him. Can you believe, I never even met the guy?"

Charles loaded up the back of his truck, until all that was left of Sang in the house was the sage and mole paint on the walls of her room, and the hanging plant over the dish drainer. "I guess that's everything," Charles said.

The truck disappeared, but Paul stood awhile longer, looking at the houses lining the street. Though Charles was her friend, she had not told him. She had not told Charles that Paul had known for months about Deirdre. That night at Farouk's apartment, after washing up in the bathroom, Sang had got down on all fours and crawled into Farouk's coat closet, weeping uncontrollably, at one point hitting herself with a shoe. She'd refused to emerge from the closet until the policeman lifted her by the armpits, and dragged her forcefully from the apartment, telling Paul to see her home. Tiny pieces of flower petals and leaves were still stuck in her hair. She had taken Paul's hand in the elevator, and all the way back to the house. In the car, she had cried continuously with her head between her knees, not letting go of Paul's hand, gripping it even as he shifted gears. He had put the seat belt on her; her body had been stiff, unyielding. She seemed to know, without looking up, when they had turned in to their road. By then, she had stopped crying. Her nose was running. She wiped it with the back of her hand. A light rain had begun to fall, and within seconds the windows and the windshield seemed covered with scratches, similar to the ones she'd inflicted on herself, the drops beading up in small diagonal lines.

The day Paul passed his exams, two of his professors took him to the Four Seasons bar for a drink. He had many drinks that afternoon, ice-cold Martinis on an unseasonably warm spring day. He drank them quickly on an empty stomach and little sleep the night before, and suddenly he was drunk. He had answered every question, passed with honors the three-hour ordeal. "Let's pretend it never happened," his committee told him, alluding to his previous embarrassment. After they left him, shaking hands a final time, patting him on the back for good measure, he went to the men's room, splashed water on his face. He pressed a plush white towel to his temples, sprayed himself with some cologne from a leather-encased bottle by the sink. Returning to the lobby, the reception desk, the massive bouquets of flowers, the well-dressed guests, the brass carts piled with expensive luggage—all of them had spun round him like a carrousel, then floated one by one in an arc across his vision. For a while, he stood watching these images appearing and fading like fireworks, not wanting them to end. He wanted money all of a sudden, enough of it to march up to the desk and request a room, a big white bed, silence.

Outside, he turned a corner, crossed a street. He walked toward Commonwealth Avenue, so different at this end from the way it was by the university. Here it was an elegant, tree-lined boulevard, flanked by spectacular homes, and benches on which to sit and admire the architecture. The cross streets progressed alphabetically, Berkeley, Clarendon, Dartmouth. He walked slowly, still drunk, looking now and then for a taxi to take him home. At Exeter Street, he noticed a couple on a bench. It was Farouk and a woman, willowy but haggard. Her bony nose was a little too large for her face. Her slim legs were crossed. Her eyes, a limpid turquoise blue, were topped with mascara-coated lashes and she blinked rapidly, as if irritated by a grain of sand.

There was an empty bench across from them. Paul walked to it and sat down. Loosening his tie, he looked directly at Farouk. For this man, Deirdre had called a perfect stranger, made a fool of herself. For this man, Sang would rush from the house, had refused all her suitors. Because the suitors didn't know her, they hadn't had a chance. "It's not love," she used to say. They still called for her now and again, their voices eager, their intentions plain. "Do you know her number in London?" some asked, but Paul had thrown it away. His head tilting this way and that way, he studied Farouk carefully. Paul had lain on top of this man. He had felt those legs, that chest, beneath his own, had smelled his skin and hair and breath. It was a knowledge he shared with Sang and Deirdre, a knowledge each had believed to be her own. Farouk and the woman exchanged glances. Let them, Paul thought, smiling, a quiet snicker escaping him. There was nothing Farouk could do to stop him; not with this new woman at his side. He slouched down, his head against the wood of the bench now, allowing the afternoon sun to warm his body, his face. He was tempted to stretch out. He closed his eyes.

He felt a poke in the side of his arm. It was Farouk, standing in front of him.

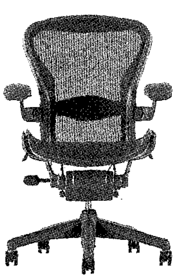
"You should be grateful I didn't sue," Farouk said. He spoke precisely yet without rancor, as if he were making casual conversation.

Paul rubbed his eyes behind his glasses, displacing them. "What?"

"You've damaged my shoulder. I had to get an M.R.I. I may need surgery."

The woman, now standing a few feet behind Farouk, said something Paul was unable to hear.

"He should know," Farouk said to the woman, his voice rising unpleasantly. Then he shrugged, and they walked off together. There was something curious about the way they were walking, together and yet with a space between them. It was only then that Paul noticed a small yellow dog at the end of a very long leash, stretched taut in the woman's hand, pulling her along the path. ♦



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THE CRITICS

THE SKY LINE

DIGITAL DREAMS

What if Howard Roark had used a Mac?

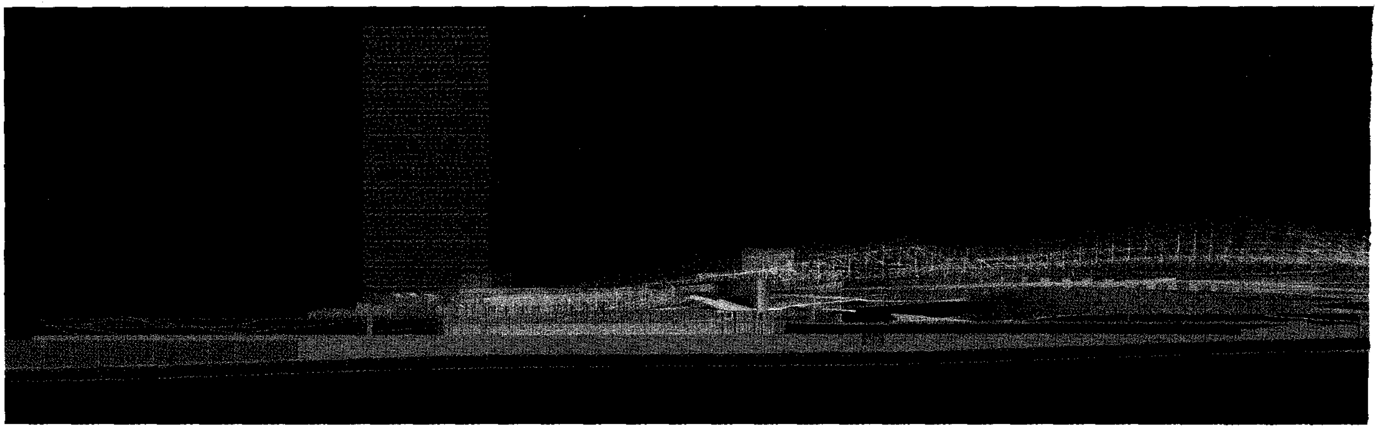
BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

A hundred years ago this month, Frank Lloyd Wright delivered an impassioned and somewhat bombastic lecture, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," at Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago. Modern technology, he said, made a new kind of architecture imperative. Indeed, a contemporary architect who designed a Greek temple or a Gothic church was a traitor to his age, and to his art. The creative vitality of architecture lay with those who embraced the new technology and celebrated it. In 1901, mass production, the steel skeleton, the elevator, and vast expanses of glass were being introduced, but most architects took great pains to hide the methods and materials that made their buildings possible. Cass Gilbert, for instance, covered the steel skeleton of the Woolworth Building with ornate terra-cotta Gothic ornamentation. For Wright and other modern theorists, such as Peter Behrens, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe, the new technology was the point.

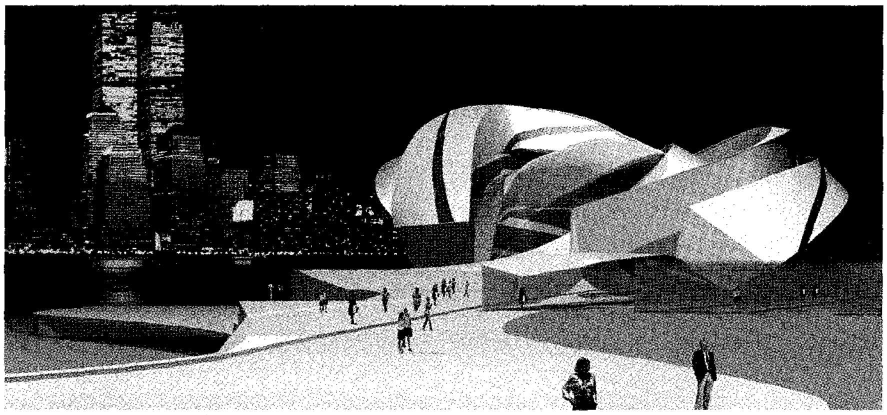
Young architects today can also make a pretty good argument that technology is creating a new architectural aesthetic, and "Folds, Blobs + Boxes: Architecture in the Digital Era," an exhibition at the Heinz Architectural Center at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, goes a long way toward demonstrating what that aesthetic is and how it relates to the rest of the culture and to the architecture of the past century. The exhibition was organized by Joseph Rosa, the center's new curator, who explains in the catalogue to the show that he intended to illustrate "the connection between twentieth-century predigital and digital blobs." Rosa is examining a new direction in architecture, something that museums are often hesitant to do. (It's usually architectural magazines that anoint trends. Museums tend to devote their wall space to shows about famous architects.)

Several years ago, the architect Greg Lynn used the word "blobs" to designate the amorphous shapes that computer-generated designs often take. Lynn is fond of jargon like "volumetric gastrulations" and the "torquing" of form. (His most famous building, the Korean Presbyterian Church in Queens, was designed while he and his two partners were in separate cities. They worked together via their computers.) Blobs are the most striking shapes created by the digital architects, but some of the best work in the exhibition falls into the other categories. Peter Stamberg and Paul Aferiat's Shelter Island Pavilion, for instance, which is a kind of exploded version of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, is classified as a box, and Peter Eisenman's Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, a blob turned in on itself, is a fold. In the end, however, the similarities between these various projects outweigh the differences. They are all self-referential, abstract shapes.

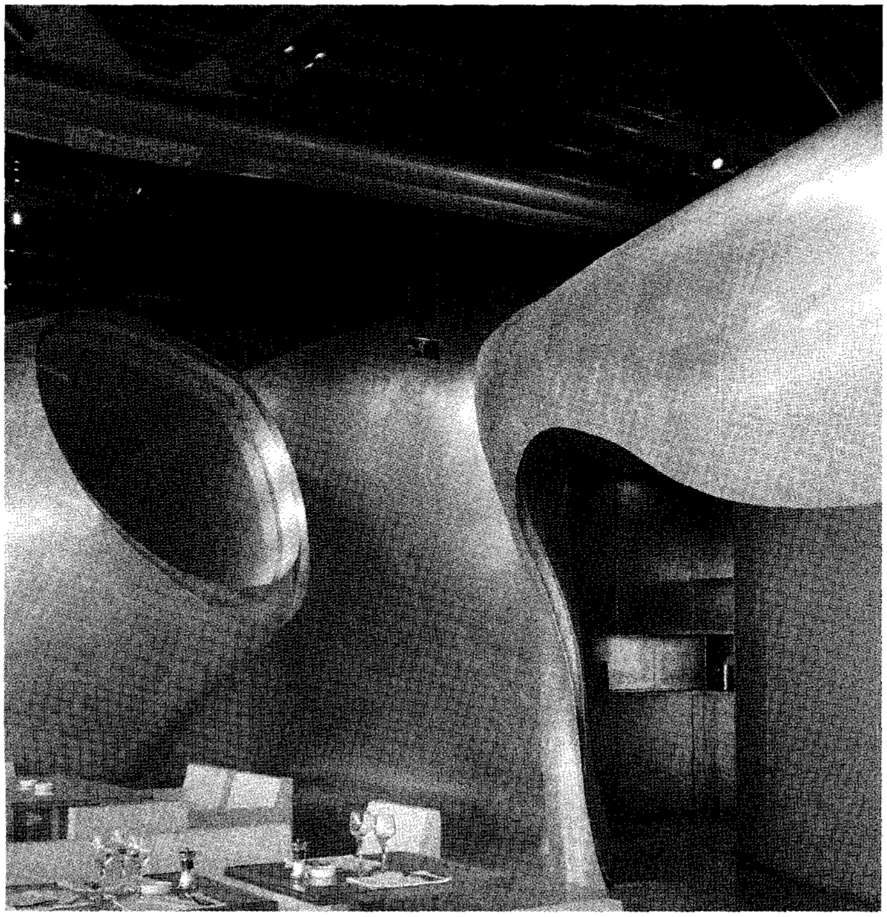
Computers have been infiltrating the drafting room for a full generation now, but until the last few years they were mainly tools that helped make conventional architecture easier to produce. A drawing that would in the past have taken an architect hours or even days to finish could be completed in a minute or two by a computer-driven drafting machine. A dozen variations on a design could be produced in an instant. As architectural software became more sophisticated in the mid-nineteen-nineties, it began to take over rendering tasks, producing perspective views of finished buildings or illustrations of interior space based on the dimensions and other data about a design. Computers can also create the specifications to make a three-

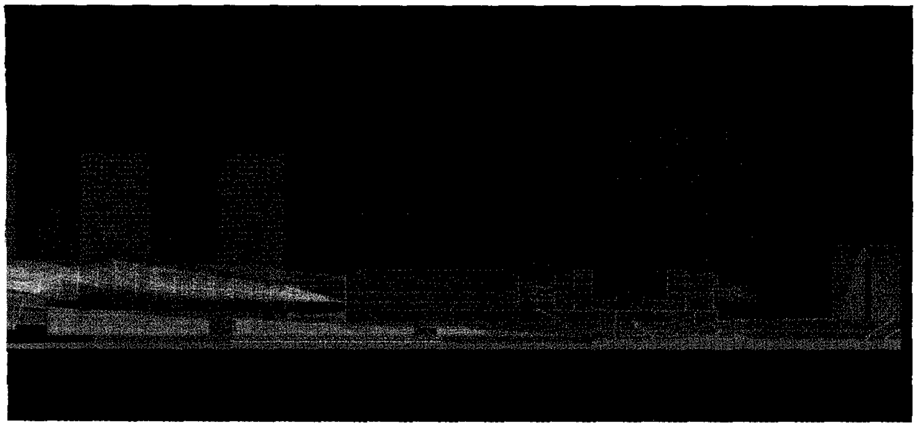


Jesse Reiser and Nanako Umemoto designed a transparent structure to cover four blocks on the far West Side of Manhattan, adjac



Peter Eisenman's design for the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. Below, a corner of Jakob & MacFarlane's restaurant at the Pompidou Center in Paris.





he Javits Center. An undulating roof would cover a public park on the top level.

dimensional model. For an exhibition at Columbia University on the work of the architect Percival Goodman, who died in 1989, a computer scanned the one surviving drawing of Goodman's 1930 project for the Palace of the Soviets and gathered enough information to produce the dimensions needed to construct a model of the building.

The Carnegie Museum show emphasizes the software that is affecting the creation of new designs. Computers produce shapes of extraordinary complexity, with swoops and bends and twists so baroque that no structural engineer could ever have figured out how to build them. A computer did the calculations and helped evaluate the engineering drawings for Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, for instance. And a computer guided the equipment that shaped the curved stone panels on the building's exterior. The form of the building sprang from Gehry's imagination, but it wouldn't have got very far without technology that did not even exist in 1990.

By the standards of a new generation, Gehry is old-fashioned. He has always designed in his head, put his ideas down on paper, and developed them further by playing with wood and foam models. His office has adapted sophisticated computers from the aerospace industry that scan the models and turn them into digital data. But that doesn't happen until Gehry decides that a design is pretty much set. Younger architects, like Greg Lynn and the Reiser and Umemoto partners, often design directly on their computers. Most of them rarely sketch, as architects have been doing since the Pyramids. No one is sure just what the effect of substituting a screen for a sheet of tracing paper is, but the computerized images of these architects lack the uncertainty, the tentativeness, the sense of creative struggle that are apparent in great architectural sketches by Louis Sullivan or Louis Kahn. The computer yields perfect shapes; it encourages swirling, curving forms and makes the most complex of them seem as easy to achieve as the simplest box.

The bloblike shapes are often sexy. They ooze, and at the Carnegie Museum many of them rotate and morph and twist and turn. The exhibition includes eight flat computer screens that

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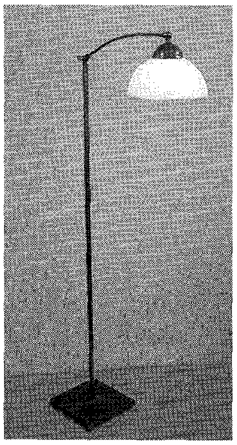

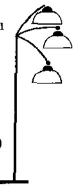

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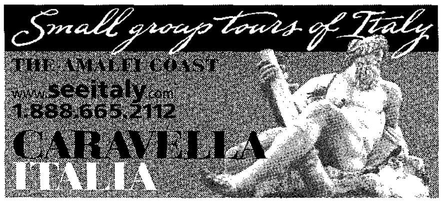

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display continuously evolving shapes. Those computer screens are the real key to what is going on, since it is there, and not in the elegant drawings on the walls and the nicely crafted models on pedestals, that the seductiveness of the technology becomes clear. Drawings and models are static, but on the computer screens virtual architecture takes off. Walls are not simply vertical planes set perpendicular to horizontal floors. Roofs are not horizontal planes that lie flat across the tops of buildings. No wonder the gifted Dutch architects Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos have named one of their buildings the Möbius House.

Digital architecture has little patience for funkiness, for casualness, for incompleteness. It is a celebration of surfaces. I wasn't surprised that Gehry, whose best buildings contain some exquisite interior spaces, is represented here by the Experience Music Project in Seattle, for which he was asked essentially to produce an empty container. Gehry's hand is visible mainly in the smooth, shimmering, multicolored metallic shell, which Rosa calls "the purest architectural blob."

Very few digitally designed structures have actually been built. One that has is the new restaurant at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which was designed by the French firm Jakob & MacFarlane. The restaurant is a colorful set of rooms on the museum's roof. It looks like something designed for the Jetsons, with a kind of glittery, Cole Porteresque overlay. A piece of digital architecture is coming to Hartford, where van Berkel and Bos have just won the commission for an addition to the Wadsworth Atheneum, the venerable museum in the center of town. Van Berkel and Bos are also finalists in the competition for an expansion of the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh. But digital architecture is still largely theoretical, as modernism once was. It didn't take long for modernism to affect the way buildings look, and Joseph Rosa says that is what is happening with the digital aesthetic today. "Terms such as beauty, scale and proportion that were once used to describe the massing, articulation, and texture of predigital architecture have given way to adjectives like smooth, supple, and morphed, derived from digital-age vernacular," he writes.

But why should digital architecture be exempt from the rules of scale and proportion that have governed every building since Adam put up his hut on the edge of paradise? Surely the concept of beauty will not become obsolete just because buildings are designed on a computer. Then, again, that assumption presumes you are talking about real buildings, and real buildings don't seem to matter all that much to many of the younger architects. If you can create the feeling of three-dimensional space on a computer screen, isn't virtual architecture just as good? "You can never talk in terms of space and perspective again," Lars Spuybroek, one of the founders of NOX, a Rotterdam architectural firm, said at a conference a couple of years ago. "So why use space and perspective again in a building?" And I don't think he meant this to be entirely rhetorical.

The kind of architecture we think of as beautiful and the kind of spaces we consider to be comfortable have a lot to do with what we have seen before, and what we have seen before is generally the result of what technology has allowed people to build. For most of architectural history, the limits of technology have meant that the basic form was a box, or some variant on it. In the twelfth century, when Gothic cathedrals, with their soaring spaces and brilliant light, were still radical, they must have been as disquieting as they were uplifting. Is it possible, though, that we could ever think of something like Lynn's Embryologic House—a prototype for mass-produced houses that looks like a human stomach blown up to gargantuan scale—as normal or beautiful? I doubt it, though I have great respect for Lynn's seriousness and for his determination to derive from digital technology a set of architectural forms as revolutionary as those crafted by the modernists. For the Embryologic House, he used a software system that helped him generate variations on a blob. Each house in the project would be made up of roughly two thousand aluminum panels assembled by a computer-controlled robotic system, much as automobiles are now manufactured.

The swooping forms in the Carnegie exhibition often seem disconnected from anything other than their own, computer-generated reality. It isn't surprising that Lynn once said how impor-

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tant it was to him "that the surface geometry is never violated by a fenestration or opening"—in other words, keep your doors and windows off my buildings, guys. (Lynn specifies louvres or moving panels in place of cutouts in his façades, so as not to impinge upon the aesthetic purity of the shape.) But Joseph Rosa reminds us that for as long as the box has defined our sense of normality in architecture we have been trying to break free of its bounds. Wright spent much of his life trying to bring hexagons and circles and other geometric shapes into architecture, and he railed against the tyrannical box. A lot of the digitally produced architecture in the Pittsburgh exhibition seems reminiscent of buildings like, say, Eero Saarinen's T.W.A. Terminal at Kennedy Airport, with its arching concrete roof and tubular passageways, or John Lautner's voluptuously curving concrete houses in Los Angeles. In the nineteen-fifties, the architect Frederick Kiesler did a series of designs for what he called the Endless House, an amorphous structure that looked strikingly like the digital blobs. As the centerpiece of what he calls predigital architecture, Rosa has included a spectacular model of the Endless House, along with a model for a smaller, somewhat similar house designed by John Johansen in 1955 to be built of sprayed-on concrete. We also get to see Buckminster Fuller's designs for the egg-shaped Dymaxion Car and a prefabricated bathroom.

Decades before the computer age, Kiesler, Johansen, Saarinen, and Lautner designed all kinds of ingenious molded, poured, and curved forms, and they got some of them built. They couldn't build everything they thought of, largely because of the limitations of construction technology (and, as Rosa points out, because of the limitations in consumer taste). Their designs look more than a bit crude compared to the sleek digital blobs, but they are thrilling nonetheless. Half a century ago, architects were imagining things that were beyond the technology of their time. Today, technology takes the lead. The digital architects—or at least the post-Gehry ones—don't dream up unusual shapes and then figure out how to get them built. Their imaginations aren't pushing into realms that technology can't reach. They start with the computer and see where it takes them. ♦

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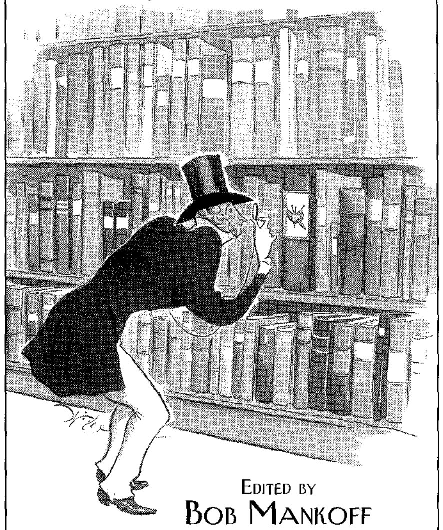

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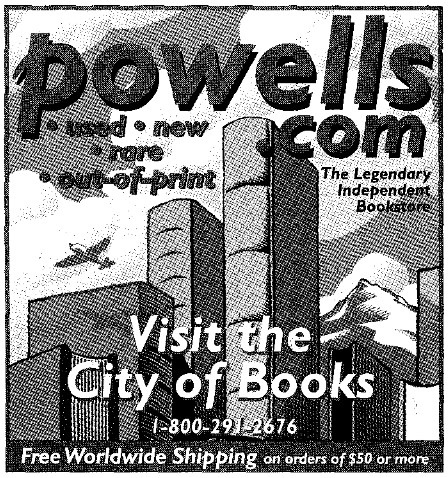
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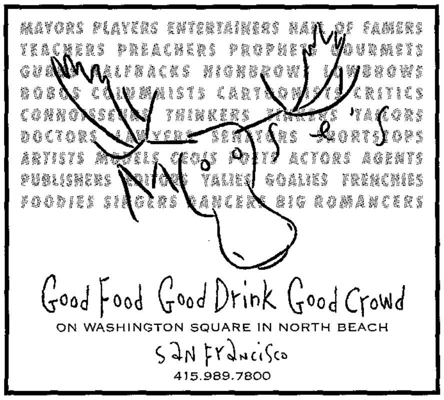
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ARDOR AND ARTIFICE

The Mozartian touch of a master poet.

BY HELEN VENDLER

The poet James Merrill (1926-1995) was wealthy (by a trust from his father, Charles Merrill, of Merrill Lynch), finely educated (first by a governess who spoke French and German, then by St. Bernard's, Lawrenceville, and Amherst), and homosexual. His poetry reflects all of these facts, but in no plain manner. Merrill was unafraid of swathing in a sinuous syntax all the words and languages that he knew, not to speak of practicing most of the lyric forms invented by the Western tradition. He became unafraid, as time went on, of being explicitly homosexual in his chronicling of the affections. His poetics was not one to please an anti-intellectual and homophobic public; and in fact the *Times*, in an editorial, stung by the award of Yale's Bollingen Prize to Merrill's "Braving the Elements," objected to it on January 16, 1973. Supposedly, the critique was aimed not at Merrill himself ("a poet of solid accomplishment and sure craftsmanship") but, rather, at the taste of the administrators of the prize, for believing that "poetry is a hermetic cultivation of one's sensibility and a fastidious manipulation of received forms." Setting up Whitman as a counterexample, the *Times* thundered, "There is a whole world west of New Haven." I mention this only to show what Merrill was up against in persisting on his path.

Merrill's work falls into two parts: a late seventeen-thousand-line "epic visionary poem" (his editors' description) issued in parts between 1976 and 1980, and published in its entirety in 1982 under the title "The Changing Light at Sandover"; and an exquisite body of lyrics newly assembled in "James Merrill: Collected Poems" (Knopf; $40), edited by Merrill's fellow poets and appreciative critics J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser. "Sandover"—because of its Ouija-board origins, its massiveness, and its difficulty—got the lion's share of critical attention during the poet's later years. Now, with the lyrics all brought into one volume (which includes a large sampling of uncollected poems), the balance may be righted to emphasize what many of us think of as Merrill's best work—his lyric poems.

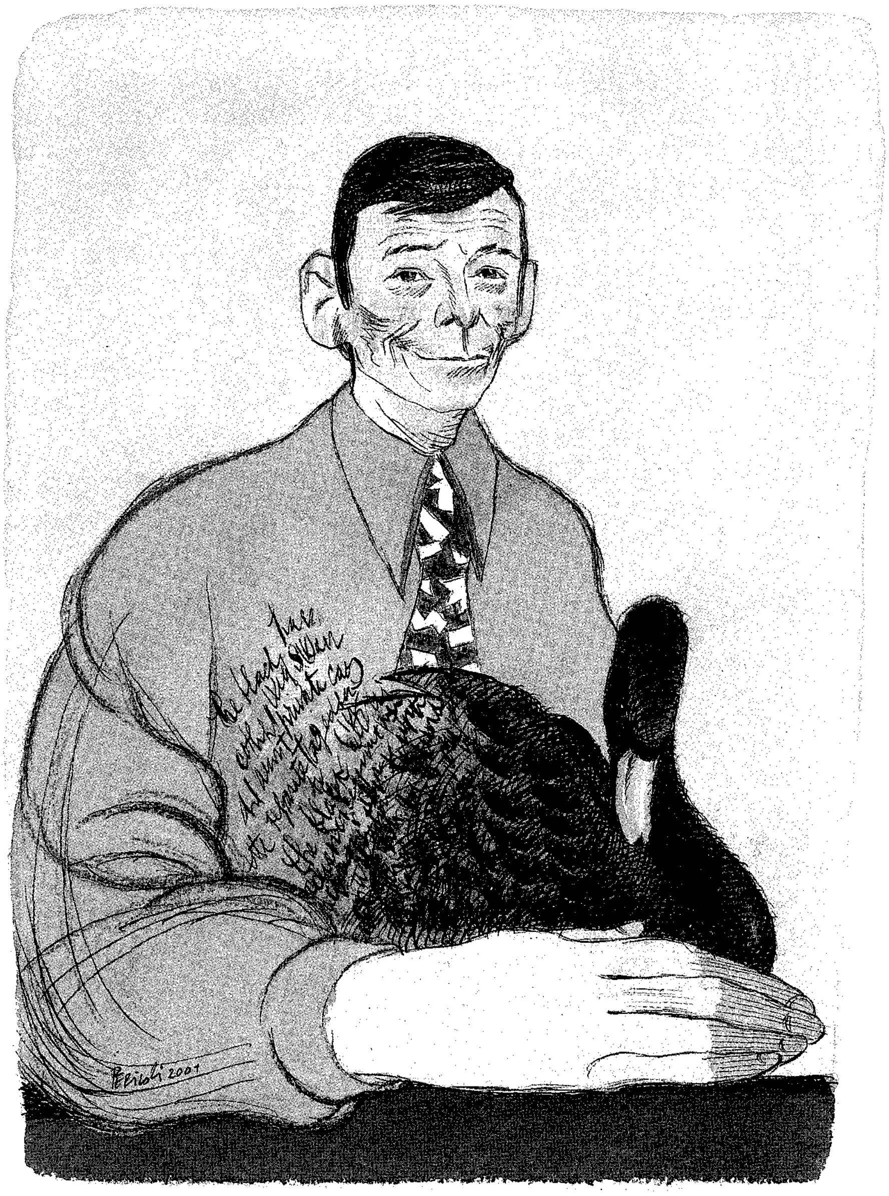
Proust and James were the godfathers of Merrill's syntax; Auden of his experiments in form; and Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933)—the Greek lyric poet of homosexual encounters—the patron of his sexual explicitness. Merrill was unashamed of his allusiveness; his relation to literary tradition was convivial rather than oppositional. The rebellious Anglophobic strain of American literary primitivism was not to his taste, any more than it was to Eliot's; both Eliot and Merrill thought of the European literary tradition as fully theirs, and fully America's. How could it be otherwise if one's mind had been formed by Dante and Valéry and Rilke?

Merrill was not admired by those American writers and reviewers who tended to repudiate European literature as the fruit of what they considered an exclusive and exclusionary tradition. He nonetheless proceeded intrepidly through their accusations of snobbery, affectation, preciousness, artifice, perversity, and élitism. He said, once, in his own defense, speaking of his use of formal meters and stanza forms:

> The attention they require at once frees and channels the unconscious, as Auden kept reminding us. Even if your poem turns out badly, you've learned something about proportion and concision and selflessness. And at best the form "received" by the next poet to use it will have taken on a new aspect because of what you learned there.

Although he never had a job (aside from short stints at teaching), Merrill worked intensely at poetry as a daily occupation, writing for fifty years about lovers, friends, opera, travel, landscape, and his various homes: an apartment in New York that had belonged to his grandmother and beloved houses in Stonington, Athens, and (later) Key West.

Merrill's chief subject, emotionally speaking, is the pain occasioned through relations with parents and lovers; yet he is a comic writer, not a tragic one, and persists in making the pain yield gracefully either to solace or to insight ("Think of music. . . . You don't *end* pieces with a dissonance"). What he is drawn to is the complex blend of joy and poignancy in Mozartian comedy:



At first, Merrill saw himself as a black swan, "A private chaos warbling in its wake."

TULLIO PERICOLI

> There is a moment comedies beget
> When escapade and hubbub die away,
> Vows are renewed, masks dropped, La
>   Folle Journée
> Arriving star by star at a septet.
> It's then the connoisseur of your bouquet
> (Who sits dry-eyed through *Oedipus* or
>   *Lear*)
> Will shed, O Happiness, a furtive tear.

A Mozartian treatment of love became, for much of his life, Merrill's occupation. After the appearance of love-as-rapture in the early poetry, the inevitable frayings in intimate relations began to demand their say, and an elegiac tone tinged the poetry as Tenderness met Time:

> These two are the past masters
> Of rime, tone, overtone.
> They write upon our faces
> Until the pen strikes bone.
>
> Time passes softly, scarcely
> Felt by me or you.
> And then, at an odd moment,
> Tenderness passes, too.

"To preserve the lyric impulse during the middle years," Merrill once wrote, "is no easy matter."

The last poems, as Merrill anticipated his own death from AIDS, made gallantry their final form of comic resolution. A friend ventures a question:

> "Do you ever wonder where you'll—"
>   Oh my dear,
> Asleep somewhere, or at the wheel. Not
>   here. . . .
>   The point's to live in style,
> Not to drop dead in it.

In fact, Merrill died just as he was discharged from a brief hospital stay in Tucson, still up and about, still travelling. A few months before his death, emaciated and frail, he had attended a gathering in his honor at Washington University in St. Louis, courteously giving every appearance of interest and pleasure.

Merrill lived in style, in both senses of the phrase. It is true that his earliest poems were often driven more by style than by feeling, becoming a "melodic, empty-headed *fin de siècle* sort of thing," as he once said. The last poems in his first book, though, were ones in which he felt "humanly more involved. . . . 'Real' experience had grazed them, somehow." As the inseparability of manner and matter grew, style and subject began to converge rather than to run on parallel planes. The poet's need for arbitrarily complex stanza forms receded: "I'm no less formal now," he said in a 1968 interview, "but I no longer dote on elaborate stanzas." (That wasn't entirely true, but in the later work elaborate stanzas were less the motive for the work than its obbligato accompaniment.)

The poems of Merrill's first book, "The Black Swan," in spite of their obliquity, reveal the young poet's sense of himself as a misfit. His first self-image is that of a solitary black swan, which, unlike the harmonious white swans, "draws / A private chaos warbling in its wake." Its neck is like a question mark; its swan song is silence; but it succeeds in transforming "time's damage" by finding "sorrow's lost secret center," which exhibits, of all things, a maypole that prefigures Merrill's determined lifelong creation of bliss in the face of blight:

> Enchanter: the black swan has learned to enter
> Sorrow's lost secret center
> Where like a maypole separate tragedies
> Are wound about a tower of ribbons.

The child-Merrill ends the poem crying "aloud / In anguish: I love the black swan." A tenacity in sticking by his socially "wrong" choices was to persist both in Merrill's life (as, defying his parents' wish that he be "All Boy," he established a household with his friend the writer and artist David Jackson) and in his work (as he refused the demotic plainness of expression that might have pleased the *Times*).

In another prescient early poem, "Variations: The Air Is Sweetest That a Thistle Guards," Merrill announces love as his chief subject, placing it under the sign of Stendhal, "for whom love was / So frankly the highest good":

>   Love merely as the best
> There is, and one would make the best of that
> By saying how it grows and in what climates, . . .
> To say at the end, however we find it, good,
> Bad, or indifferent, it helps us, and the air
> Is sweetest there. The air is very sweet.

There are many problems (encountered by poets from Petrarch to Shakespeare) in electing "love" as a subject, and almost all appear in Merrill: the felt contrast between an altruistic concept of morals and the narcissism and opportunism of erotic experience; the self-incrimination that follows on mistaken choice; the repetition-compulsion that convicts one, eventually, of apparently irremediable stupidity in love matters; the tendency of sexual intensity to fade; the incongruity of erotic feeling in an aging body; infidelity to a life partner. One of the compelling and page-turning attractions of the poems is viewing the author's unsparing self-analysis (conducted on the best Stendhalian principles) as the years and volumes pass before the reader's eye.

In love, Merrill is ever "pulled two ways at once by the distant star / Called Plenitude and the bald planet Ebb," recognizing, even in the first book, his own complicity in the ending of any love affair: "It appears we seek whatever we do seek only / That we may cry Enough!" The lasting hope is that art may transmute the disappointments of life into something more radiant and stable; the lasting bitterness is that although art may guide "what pangs there be / Into a bearable choreography," it does not repair the original life-rift.

"I see you've managed to hold on to yesterday's gains."

As he recognized the irrational recurrence of erotic compulsion, Merrill came sometimes to think of himself—of all of us—as puppets of the god Eros (later enlarged in "Sandover" to "God B," the "B" standing for "biology"). As a young man, the poet was shocked by his possession by Eros, a reaction manifest in the 1959 poem "The Dunes." The dunes are relieved at their escape from the jaws of the ocean: "at last a way / Out of its insane frothing, those white jaws / In which they were nothing." Yet there remains a subterranean desire to repeat the experience—"a certain creeper yearning seaward / Over a dry admonitory drift"—and soon enough there appear in the poem "a burning couple far away":

> Absolute innocence, fiery, mild. And yet
> *Soon even they were lost behind the dunes.*

Since no one can pretend for very long to the "absolute innocence" of those lovers, Merrill takes on, in the same volume, the foreseeably successive nature of his present and future love affairs. His surrogate becomes the phoenix, forever dying in its bed of flame and then resurrecting itself from the ashes:

> So that a sumptuous monotony
> Sets in, a pendulum of amethysts
> In the shape of a bird, keyed up for ever fiercer
> Flights between ardor and ashes. . . .
>   And in the end, despite
> Its pyrotechnic curiosity, the process
> Palls.

Up to this point, Merrill has represented himself as helpless under the onslaught of desire. Nonetheless, his future reminiscences—comic, poignant—never entirely absolve him from responsibility, and he begins to see, in his thirties, his poetic duty: to admit the darker and more repellent side of life, love, and his own promiscuity. After a new experiment in love, he swears an oath to a new poetic:

> Upon that book I swear
> To abide by what it teaches:
> Gospels of ugliness and waste,

Of towering voids, of soiled gusts,
Of a shrieking to be faced
Full into, eyes astream with cold—

With cold?
All right then. With self-knowledge.

The problem with this vocabulary of ugliness, waste, and soiled gusts is that it doesn't lend itself to a poetics of comedy. The intricate task Merrill took on, during the rest of his writing life, was to enfold love's worse moments—ranging from the minor irritants of quarrels and disappointments to the major scars of betrayal and death—in a light and gauzy texture, to lift them by sheer style to the essentially comic realm of the seen and seen-through. The metaphors of tragedy—abysses, cyclones, shrieks—were replaced by the metaphors of comedy: theatre, prisms, magicians. The tone of doom was lightened by the diction of the everyday: seeing in Istanbul the emptiness of Hagia Sophia (which has passed from cathedral to mosque to "flame- / less void"), and feeling an interior resemblance between his own mind and the cathedral's "transcendental skull," he remarks dryly to himself:

You'd let go
Learning and faith as well, you too had
wrecked
Your precious sensibility. What else did
you expect?

The last stage in this lightening of the tragic by the texture of the comic is reached in "Family Week at Oracle Ranch," a wonderfully funny and sad sequence (twelve poems composed in *abca* quatrains). We are in Merrill's last volume, "A Scattering of Salts," and the poet has come with his lover to spend a month at a therapeutic center. He does not feel much hope that Oracle Ranch will help their declining relationship, and his flippant scorn trails off in wistfulness:

As if a month at what it invites us to think
Is little more than a fat farm for Anorexics,
Substance Abusers, Love & Relationship
Addicts
Could help *you*, light of my life, when
even your shrink . . .

The poet is first appalled by the crudity of the psychology of the place and its clichés: one is allowed only seven words ("AFRAID, / HURT, LONELY, etc.") with which to express oneself.

The connoisseur of feeling throws up
his hands:
Used to depicting personal anguish

With a full palette—hues, oils, glazes,
thinner—
He stares into these withered wells and
feels,
Well . . . SAD and ANGRY?

Astonishingly, the old words work, in all their worn familiarity, better than his fancy ones. He watches satirically the transparent theatrical strategies of the "counsellors"—Gestalt therapy with a Teddy bear (oneself as a child), finding a "safe place" in the room when the group therapy becomes acrimonious, visualizing one's childhood home, enumerating and regrieving past griefs, and listening to therapeutic mantras ("You are a brave and special person"). Yet, for all his resistance, the tricks succeed: at the visualization of "home," "Years have begun to flow / Unhindered down my face. Why? / Because nobody's there."

It's evident that Merrill's response to the psychic magic is not uncorroded by doubt as to the long-term efficacy of the seven therapeutic words. Yet the plunge into primal expression ("SAD") and schematic remembrance ("home") has occasioned not only satire directed at Oracle Ranch and its language but also a rueful acknowledgment of the elementary nature of feeling, no matter how elaborate its eventual transmutation into art.

By the end of his life, a broad democracy of suffering replaces both the youthful isolation of the earliest work and the somewhat larger, but still restricted, social compass of the middle poems. As "Family Week at Oracle Ranch" amply shows, Merrill has become far more interested in American culture, low as well as high, and has redefined the "love lyric" not necessarily as the secretive record of phoenix ecstasy (or even phoenix monotony) but as a part of a contemporary social canvas. The poet can admit that his emotional life doesn't differ very much from that of other people. As "Ken" the counsellor says:

We hope that we have shown you just
how much
You have in common with everybody
else.

Not to be "terminally unique"

Will be the consolation you take home.

Merrill, who had begun by thinking of himself as a "terminally unique" black swan, discovers an odd relief in this.

Since, as Merrill once said, "the Muse matures with her poet," his second large subject, art—standing in for the larger subject of consciousness itself—changes, like love, over time. How do we receive, sift, symbolize, and stylize our experience? It wasn't always clear to Merrill, rhetorically speaking, whether his patron was to be the divine Apollo or Apollo's mortal rival, Marsyas (flayed to death for his ambition). In a wonderful 1959 sonnet, Marsyas sets up the opposition between his own demotic verses and Apollo's lofty forms:

I used to write in the café sometimes:
Poems on menus, read all over town
Or talked out before ever written down.
One day a girl brought in his latest book.
I opened it—stiff rhythms, gorgeous
rhymes—
And made a face.

But Marsyas, flayed and hanged, loses out to Apollo:

They found me dangling where his
golden wind
Inflicted so much music on the lyre
That no one could have told you what
he sang.

Apollo's is a Paterian poetry that overwhelms sheerly by its music, a poetry in which the matter is subordinate to the manner. Merrill tried, in his youth, under the influence of "the impenetrable quatrains of Mallarmé," to "create a surface of such impenetrability and, at the same time, such beauty that it wouldn't yield up a meaning easily, if at all. Maybe eventually one gets tired of that kind of thing, though in my weak moments I still find myself drawn to it." By the time of this sonnet, however, the poet is already visibly tempted by the colloquial voice of Marsyas, which gets along without the "stiff rhythms, gorgeous rhymes" of Apollo.

The rivalry between Apollo and Marsyas for Merrill's soul never faded. "Oracle Ranch" is largely written in the everyday tone of Marsyas (who became a more dominant figure as Merrill increasingly allowed himself a relaxed and conversational style). But even in the last poems, Merrill is still obsessed, as an artist, with understanding the secret life of language. Language begins with the letter, progresses to the word, advances to the rhyme, and ends in the stanza. In a 1995 poem called "b o d y," the individual letters interest Merrill in their shape, their symbolism, and their sound. As Merrill, mortally ill, thinks of his body, so soon to disappear, the letters begin to glow with their own significance. The "o" seems to him like a little black-outlined moon; "b" and "d" not only incorporate "o" in their graphic shapes but also can become shorthand for "birth" and "death"; and "y," sounded out, says "Why." Reflections of this sort bring the poem into being:

Look closely at the letters. Can you see,
entering (stage right), then floating full,
then heading off—so soon—
how like a little kohl-rimmed moon
o plots her course from *b* to *d*

—as *y*, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?

The pang in "so soon—" gives pathos to the little journey of the deathwards "o."

Not all poets are so minutely interested in the tiniest elements of language: each poet has, so to speak, a chief plane of linguistic interest—sonic, etymological, lexical. Merrill is unusual in that almost every plane of the linguistic, including the pun (a taste he shared with Keats), appeals to him. He possessed an enormous facility in rhyme, but he also enjoyed its simplest games, such as finding words that enclosed within themselves a more or less exact rhyme word: "dread" and "read," "heart" and "art," "stairs" and "stars," "shame" and "same." Struck by the vowel change in the phrase "the man in the moon," he assembles (in another game) words or parts of words that resemble each other except for the middle vowel, and makes a song out of them. This is the first half of the poem, set as he somewhat unwillingly flies (emotionally and literally) from Byzantium:

Up spoke the man in the moon:
"What does that moan mean?
The plane was part of the plan.
Why gnaw the bone of a boon?"

I said with spleen, "Explain
These nights that tie me in knots,
All drama and no dream,
While you lampoon my pain."

He then: "Lusters are least
Dimmed among the damned.
The point's to live, love,
Not shake your fist at the feast."

For many readers—and even many critics—writing this way is merely tatting around the edges of art. And although this dialogue certainly doesn't represent the height of Merrill's accomplishment, the curiosity about sounds that it displays lies behind the surprise of many of his beautiful and unusual rhymes. Merrill enjoys the wit of finding "bath to" as a rhyme for "Matthew," or "décor" as a rhyme for "war," but his real genius, in terms of form, is to write rhyming narrative stanzas that ripple effortlessly down the page. (Less skillful hands tend to distort something—sense, rhythm, syntax—to force rhymes into place.) Here is a short incident (rhyming *abba*) from the close of a 1972 poem, "Up and Down." Merrill's mother has taken him down to the bank vault where the jewels his father had given her are stored. She wants to give her son one of her rings, an emerald, so that he can give it to his future bride (keeping up the pretense that someday there will *be* a bride):

She next picks out a ring. "He gave
Me this when you were born. Here, take it for—

For when you marry. For your bride. It's yours."
A den of greenest light, it grows, shrinks, glows,
Hermetic stanza bedded in the prose
Of the last thirty semiprecious years.

I do not tell her, it would sound theatrical,
Indeed this green room's mine, my very life.
We are each other's; there will be no wife;
The little feet that patter here are metrical.

But onto her worn knuckle slip the ring.
Wear it for me, I silently entreat,
Until—until the time comes. Our eyes meet.
The world beneath the world is brightening.

Later poems adopt stanza forms freer than this. An ironic and touching self-elegy called "Self-Portrait in Tyvek$^{(\mathrm{TM})}$ Windbreaker," in the last book, amuses itself rhyming "crystals" with "whistles," "puffins" with "coffins," using an eight-line stanza for which the only fixed rule is that the first line must rhyme with the last, and at least two rhymed lines must be found within. In his self-portrait, Merrill—once again the culture critic—is describing the New Age shop where he bought his world-map-imprinted white Tyvek windbreaker:

I found it in one of those vaguely imbecile
Emporia catering to the collective unconscious
Of our time and place. This one featured crystals,
Cassettes of whalesong and rain-forest whistles,
Barometers, herbal cosmetics, pillows like puffins,
Recycled notebooks, mechanized lucite coffins
For sapphire waves that crest, break, and recede,
As they presumably do in nature still.

By the end of his life, Merrill can sketch in this easy and deft way anything that passes under his alert eye, and find for his description a flowing line and a chiming rhyme.

If you like poetry composed (in Hopkins's words) in "the current language heightened," Merrill will please you. If you like a wry refraction of contemporary institutions, from "imbecile emporia" to therapeutic ranches; if you have despaired of finding words subtle enough for all that goes on between lovers over time; if you are delighted by poetic invention, Merrill will please you. If you are eager for a window into the pangs and pleasures of gay existence, or if you want to know what a person of ever-attentive receptivity might have seen between 1926 and 1995, Merrill will please you.

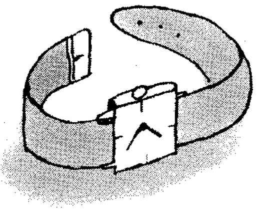
Above all, if you value lightness of touch, Merrill will please you. He tells, in a Class Day talk he gave at Amherst College, of a speech by the former president of the college introducing a reading by Robert Frost: " 'The winkles,' said Dr. Cole, 'the winkles that you see on Mr. Fwost's bwow do not come from old age or wowwy, but the weight of the wreath.' " The weight of the wreath is heavy on all poets, but Merrill rarely allowed the weight to be felt, or the wrinkles to show. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Glass Palace, *by Amitav Ghosh (Random House; $25.95).* This sprawling narrative, inspired by stories passed down in the author's family, stretches from the British invasion of Burma, in 1885, through the country's independence, to the uneasy military rule of the present day. The novel is presided over by the Indian-born Rajkumar, a poor orphan, who falls for Dolly, a servant of the exiled queen. Ghosh renders the polite imprisonment of the Burmese royal family in India and the lush, dangerous atmosphere of teak camps in the Burmese forest with fine detail—a perfect balance for the broad strokes of romance and serendipity that drive the story forward. The book's memorial power is so strong that, near the end, when Rajkumar, an old man, reflects, "Ah, Burma—now Burma was a golden land," the reader catches himself nodding in recognition of what was lost.

The 25th Hour, *by David Benioff (Carroll & Graf; $24).* Busted for drug dealing and facing a seven-year stretch in federal prison upstate, a flashy, fast-talking, twenty-six-year-old Brooklynite named Monty Brogan has one day in which to settle his affairs—or to make his escape. While he wanders the city, brooding on lost opportunities, his two best friends from high school (continually engaged in Seinfeldian bickering) and a handful of associates from the Russian mob converge for a late-night going-away party in the V.I.P. lounge of a downtown club. Benioff's first novel is as unusual as it is well wrought: it resonates with a Whitmanesque sense of the city's possibilities and unsatisfied longings.

The Man Who Found the Missing Link, *by Pat Shipman (Simon & Schuster; $28).* Contentious to the point of paranoia, the Dutch physician and anatomist Eugène Dubois had thoroughly alienated his colleagues by the time he died, in 1940. Dubois was a great believer in evolution; in 1887, he set off for Indonesia to hunt for proto-human fossil remains that would provide the link between apes and human beings. Eight years later, he returned triumphantly to Holland, bringing fragments of a being he called *Pithecanthropus erectus* (now known as *Homo erectus*). When his discoveries and theories met with some skepticism, however, he became obsessive and bitter, permanently damaging his reputation. Here Shipman reminds us of the value of his work and the audacity of his vision.



The Medicine Line, *by Beth LaDow (Routledge; $25).* The medicine line, a hundred-mile stretch of the U.S.-Canadian border at the top of Blaine County, Montana, epitomizes borderlessness. "The prairie stretches seamlessly outward," LaDow writes, "as if the wind were blowing it toward the Rockies." But the region is thick with stories: Sitting Bull crossed and recrossed the medicine line during the Sioux resistance, and the settlements that arose on both sides of the border in the late nineteenth century included Chinese, Norwegians, Jews, and Mennonites. Wallace Stegner, who grew up near the medicine line, caught the landscape's harsh, wild beauty, and in this fine book LaDow gives it the history it deserves.

The Beauty of the Husband, *by Anne Carson (Knopf; $22).* This new poem by the well-known classicist is at once the story of a failed marriage and an exploration of Romantic notions of beauty and truth. But Carson's idiosyncratic voice and her punchy declarative style—"You want a clean life I live a dirty one"—quickly make it clear that hers is a thoroughly modern take on the intimate cruelties of married life. And this is the primary pleasure of her writing: it is both entirely new and strangely familiar, like remembering a private language we thought we'd forgotten.

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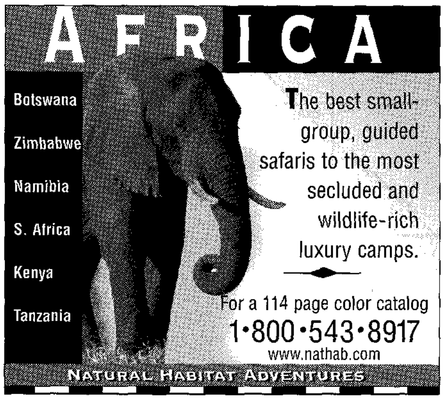

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BOOGIE AND BEYOND

Twyla Tharp's new company.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

What a heartbreaker ballet is these days. You go to American Ballet Theatre and watch the company's excellent, well-coached dancers. Then you go home and open your mail and find out that next season A.B.T. is presenting a cavalcade of insipid, pseudo-nineteenth-century story ballets—John Cranko's "Onegin," Ronald Hynd's "Merry Widow," and others—in which those dancers would be hard pressed to show us half of what they can do. You go to New York City Ballet and see a wonderful new piece, "Polyphonia," by Christopher Wheeldon; you go back for the next new piece, and it's Eliot Feld's "Organon," the silliest thing you've ever seen. Two weeks ago, I attended a program called "International Ballet Gala: Stars of the 21st Century," at New York State Theatre, and listened to the audience clap like mad for a program that consisted largely of overwrought ballerina-flingers. "I should start doing more book reviews," I said to myself. Then, the next night, Twyla Tharp opened at the Joyce.

Don't count on Tharp. For more than twenty years she had a superb modern-dance company. In 1988, she folded it, because she wanted to do other things. Then she missed her troupe, so she put together a second one, and soon folded it. Then another one, which she also dissolved in short order. Now Harvey Lichtenstein, the chairman of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Local Development Corporation—its mission is to bring more joy and jobs to Fort Greene—has found Tharp a rehearsal space on the second floor of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, five blocks from BAM. She has taken a five-year lease and has formed yet another troupe.

Those other companies, she told the *Village Voice*, weren't really companies. They were "projects." This group is really a company, and it's not just going to put on concerts. (Tharp is always maniacally ambitious.) It's going to have open rehearsals and chamber performances. It's going to videotape Tharp's œuvre, and hold summer workshops. Next year, Tharp says, she plans to double the company's size, from six dancers to twelve. The following year, she'll double it again, to twenty-four dancers, and turn it into the Brooklyn Ballet, capable of performing "any technique and any repertory" from the past century.

Good luck to you, Tharp! Get a development director! Also, get some dancers who aren't members of other companies. (Half of her current dancers are fully employed elsewhere.) Never mind, though. Even if she does only a small portion of what she has planned—even if she only stages an annual home season and tours a bit, which is what other companies do—that would be fine, for in late February, at the Joyce, the reborn Twyla Tharp Dance gave its first New York season, and it was lovely.

There were two pieces, both new: "Mozart Clarinet Quintet K. 581," set to that beloved score, and "Surfer at the River Styx," set to some banging on a can by Donald Knaack. The winner was the first, a sweet, cuddly ballet. Tharp was a "crossover" choreographer, the first and most influential emigrant from modern dance to classical ballet, and for years—in "Deuce Coupe," "Push Comes to Shove," and other pieces—she got a lot of steam out of that alone, out of juxtaposing ballet with various forms of boogie. It was fabulous, it was fun, and after about a decade it was tiresome. Ballet combined with "lower" forms? Big deal. That's what Marius Petipa did in "Swan Lake," combining ballet with folk dance. It's also what Balanchine did, crossing ballet with jazz dance. Like other great forms, ballet has good digestion; you can feed it almost anything. Once you do, however, and the spectators say, "Gee, those dancers are doing the monkey on point!," they're going to expect you, next time, to make a dance.

Tharp spent too long trying to shock us, but apparently she's getting over it now, or so "Mozart Clarinet Quintet" suggests. Though there are no point shoes, it is a ballet, and though it contains vernacular forms, they are not separated from the ballet steps. They are absorbed into them, loosening them, relaxing them.

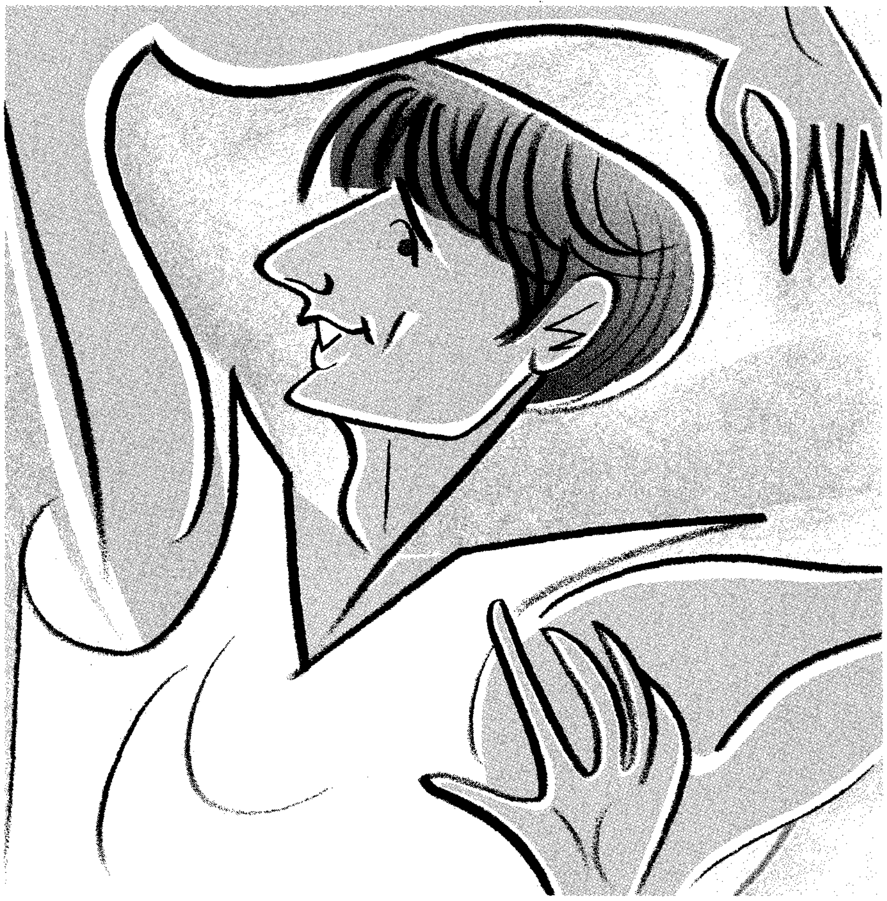
Insofar as the piece has a story, you could say it's about a day at the beach. (The men are in white pants, the women in stylized swimsuits, by Santo Loquasto.) It is also, like so much ballet, about men and women and what goes on between them. But Tharp is a smart, witty person, so we don't just have couples. We have a couple and a trio, and the trio is more intimate than the couple. Into the dances for the couple Tharp has poured all her love of vaudeville. The two dancers, Elizabeth Parkinson and Keith Roberts, keep bumping into each other, and they do a lot of fancy combinations with a heavy "whoops" component. ("Whoops, they're going to fall," and they don't.) There was probably more of that than Tharp intended. Parkinson, like the rest of the company, was ballet-trained, but she has spent the past two years popping her pelvis on Broadway, in "Fosse," and she no longer looks comfortable in ballet. There were some close calls. In general, the company was under-rehearsed.

But the heart of the piece is the trio, for two men, John Selya and Benjamin Bowman, and their shared lady, Ashley Tuttle, of American Ballet Theatre. How can love be divided among three people? I don't know, but "Design for Living" is back on Broadway, and Tharp, too, can imagine such a setup. Practically all the dances for this trio end in lifts—complicated, acrobatic lifts that are also sexy lifts, with a lot of inner-thigh involvement. And they're not just sexy; they're companionable, affectionate. I don't know which guy Tuttle is going to end up with after this beach party; maybe both. Tharp makes that seem entirely appropriate.

"Mozart Clarinet Quintet" wouldn't be what it is, however, with a different cast. One of Tharp's great gifts is her eye for dancers. Again and again, once she went freelance, she could walk into a ballet company, look around, pick out the interesting dancers whom the troupe had ignored—often because their body type was not ideal for ballet—and show us what they had. Selya and Tuttle are two such cases. Selya, who has a big, chunky chest, danced with A.B.T. for a decade, but he was never promoted out of the corps de ballet. Tuttle is a principal dancer with A.B.T., but she tends to be scheduled for matinées. She is dainty and subtle, not a dancer for a four-thousand-seat house like the Met, A.B.T.'s home. Tharp has taken these two and made them heroes. Tuttle, with her finesse and musicality; Selya, with his brio and his floppy hair: they have never looked better than they did in "Mozart Clarinet Quintet."

As for the second work on the program, "Surfer at the River Styx," Tharp told the *Times* that it was in fact "The Bacchae," by Euripides. The women came out in black outfits and shook their ponytails around, trying, presumably, to look like bacchantes. Selya came out and bossed everyone around. I guess he was supposed to be Pentheus, the hubristic king in "The Bacchae." The piece was dithery and opaque—and, unlike the Mozart, it *did* rely on the old ballet/boogie juxtaposition—but you liked it anyway, because of Selya's solo.

Watching this dance, I realized that I had been waiting ten years for someone to make a decent solo for Selya. My son was a student at the School of American Ballet, the academy of New York City Ballet. From his class of about eight boys, only one, to my knowledge, became a ballet dancer: John Selya. I once asked my son whether Selya, in school, worked harder than the other boys. "No," he said. "Terrible goof-off." Was there anything special about him? "Yes," my son said. "Whatever the teacher asked for, he could do it. We tried it. He did it." In other words, he was born to dance. His long solo in "Surfer" includes ballet, kung fu, Kabuki, voguing, Muhammad Ali, and, if I am not mistaken, varsity rowing. Selya made it seem like a journey to the center of the earth—hellfire and anguish combined. He is a wonderful, unique dancer, and Tharp understood that.


ROBERT RISKO

Tharp has a gift for finding interesting dancers other troupes ignore, like John Selya.

In the sixties, modern dance, like the other arts, took a turn toward conceptualism. Music, stories, stars—all the things that could draw you into an illusion, make you lose yourself in the show—were banished. The result was cleansing, but it was also a dead end. Once you knew what the art was made up of, what did you have apart from a knowledge of what the art was made up of? Nothing, and you still wanted a show. Tharp was part of that avant-garde. Then, in the seventies, she changed. She started using music; she tried to give the audience a good time. People downtown stopped speaking to her. She had "sold out."

Bless her. Today, when I see cool, sophisticated choreographers doing a little dance show in which people actually dance, I think of her. In January, as part of the Joyce's "Altogether Different" series, Mark Dendy and Irène Hultman, two prominent downtowners, put on modest programs in which the dancers mostly bopped around to popular music. Dendy and Hultman are very ambitious artists. Prior to the Joyce season, Dendy's last production was "Dream Analysis," a full-evening dance-drama about psychotherapy and Nijinsky and Martha Graham and your mother. Hultman's previous piece—"Love, Betrayal, and a Bowling Trophy," also an evening-length work—was about Don Juan and Molière and Mozart and gender relations. Both choreographers, in their dance-to-the-music Joyce shows, were self-consciously playful, as if to say to us, "This isn't what I normally do." (In fact, Hultman said exactly those words in the meet-the-artist session that followed her opening night.) Dendy's "Dream Analysis" is a heavenly piece—it should go to Broadway—and Hultman's "Love, Betrayal" is also excellent. Still, choreographers, however much they have read Molière, should never get too far from dancing to the music, and it is comforting to see them fall back on it. When they do, they are probably not thinking about Twyla Tharp. They're thinking about the club scene in the eighties, or the party they went to last weekend. But Tharp showed the way—back to dance. ♦

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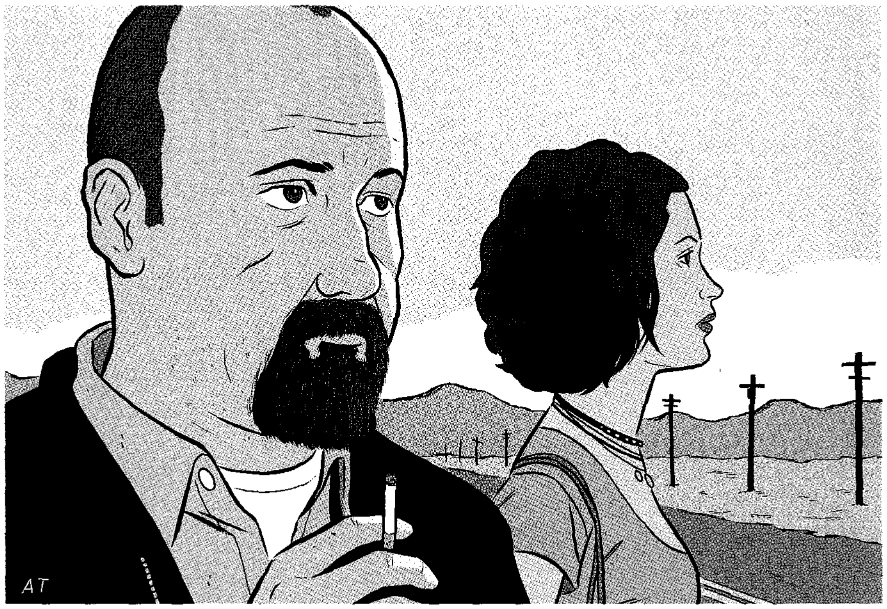
THE CURRENT CINEMA

A GUN IN THE SUN

Americans run amok; the French play it quieter.

BY DAVID DENBY

The way Brad Pitt throws himself around you might think his body weighs nothing and he doesn't much care where he lands. He doesn't want to look graceful, particularly, just airborne and free and maybe a little crazy. Pitt's a showoff without vanity, which seems like a contradiction until you've seen him move. Twice in the past two years he's played a reckless bare-knuckle boxer—in the ludicrous "Fight Club" and in Guy Ritchie's jaunty, heartlessly entertaining "Snatch"—and I've never been sure which way he was going to lunge next. He first made his mark in movies by appearing naked (viewed from the rear) in "Thelma & Louise," and he's been uncovered a great deal ever since—with good reason, it turns out, since he's muscular yet slender and quick, uncoiling in a flash. And yet, for all the exposure, Pitt is a guarded performer. He likes to play flakes who sit around in rotting clothes and funny hats, communicating little. Often he hides behind a bit of fuzzy beard, as if he hated the boyish face that he's condemned to wear; he disguises his natural voice with goofy German or Irish accents. It's a big running joke in "Snatch" that no one can understand a word his gypsy-boxer character says. But no one ever understands a word Brad Pitt says, even when he's speaking perfectly clear English. He doesn't give words any special power; he doesn't frame an emotion and make the audience feel it. Instead, he ducks and shies away from the camera, though the recording angel caught up with him a few years ago in that three-hour bout of tedium called "Meet Joe



"The Mexican": one of those south-of-the-border romps in which not much makes sense.

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Black." The camera met Joe Black and found nothing—a blank. Brad Pitt is a magazine-cover sensation, but he's not an actor and not really a movie star, either (there are plenty of flops in that career).

In "The Mexican," Pitt has many opportunities to define himself, but he horses around more than a donkey, sputtering and screw-loosing his way through the picture. He's moderately pleasant but so jangly and uncentered that you feel like you're indulging him just by watching the movie to the end. Pitt plays Jerry, who's not a bad guy, just a little dim and very careless. Having fallen into the hands of some ruthless Los Angeles gangsters, Jerry is sent to Mexico to retrieve a priceless antique pistol called the Mexican; his girlfriend, Sam (Julia Roberts), who loves him but is disgusted with his losing ways, flounces off to Vegas, where she's kidnapped by a hit man, Leroy (James Gandolfini), and held as a hostage in case Jerry tries to sell the fabled gun. "The Mexican" is a shaggy-taco story—one of those south-of-the-border romps in which many people die in odd ways and the Mexicans are either gap-toothed cretins or unspeakably dignified grandees (you can tell the latter by their melancholy reserve). One thing happens, and then another, and none of it makes much sense. The Americans muck around, getting into trouble, and the director, Gore Verbinski ("Mouse Hunt"), mucks around, too, making slapstick visual jokes, one or two of which are funny. There is much lore about the gun, including three scenes of the pistol's peculiar past which are filmed—for that timeless, legendary quality—in tinted black-and-white with a hand-cranked camera. These scenes look less like the gritty realism of "Traffic" than like jokey wine commercials. (*Califia! Qué rico!*) Verbinski and the screenwriter, J. H. Wyman, may have been trying for the multilevel playfulness of something like "Pulp Fiction," but the production veers haplessly between facetiousness and solemnity. "The Mexican" has no rhythm.

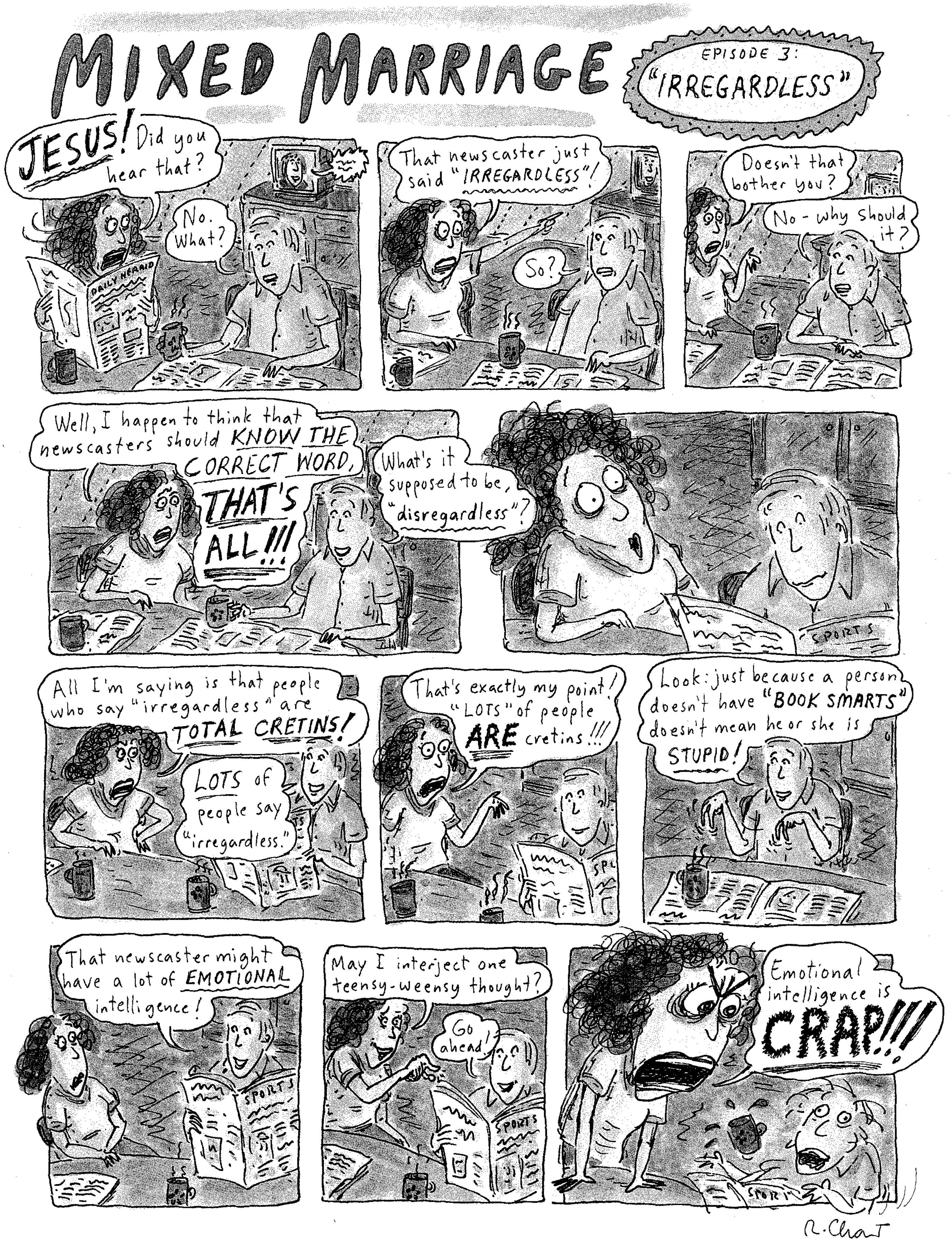
ADRIAN TOMINE

Julia Roberts appears with Pitt only at the beginning and the end of the story, and much of that time she's kicking his shins, bitching about his faults. He fends her off, but she keeps harping, and as they continue their Punch-and-Judy act it's hard to see any signs of the alleged great love between them (we keep hearing about it) which makes them fight so hard. As romantic comedy, "The Mexican" is a dud—these two just don't go together. Roberts has some sweet, funny moments—her character speaks earnest psychobabble—but for the first time in her career she's strident, and one begins to wonder if she had trouble getting Pitt's full attention and just blew up at him on camera. She develops a much greater rapport with James Gandolfini, who has the best-written role, as a homosexual thug unhappy over his failed love affairs. The criminal life, Gandolfini's hit man concludes, is not conducive to sustained relationships. True, true—it's the only true thing in the picture. In "The Sopranos," what's fascinating about Gandolfini's acting is the play in his Tony Soprano between cruelty and sensitivity, and Verbinski had the sense to let him go even further with these contraries and make a new character out of them. If Tony Soprano is a thug with inner wounds, Leroy is a thug who longs to act tenderly. Bulky and morose, Gandolfini makes little twitching movements with his eyes and his small mouth; he lets us know that there's more consciousness in his brutal characters than they can quite put into words. The filmmakers build up sympathy for Gandolfini throughout the movie, and then, in a spasm of ineptitude, they abruptly toss it away, allowing his character to die without so much as a farewell. The two stars then go back to their tiresome, slap-happy quarrel. In everything James Gandolfini does, he expresses himself effortlessly, but nothing happens to Brad Pitt's emotions in the course of "The Mexican," and at the end of the movie the audience, like an abandoned lover, is still trying to figure out who he is.

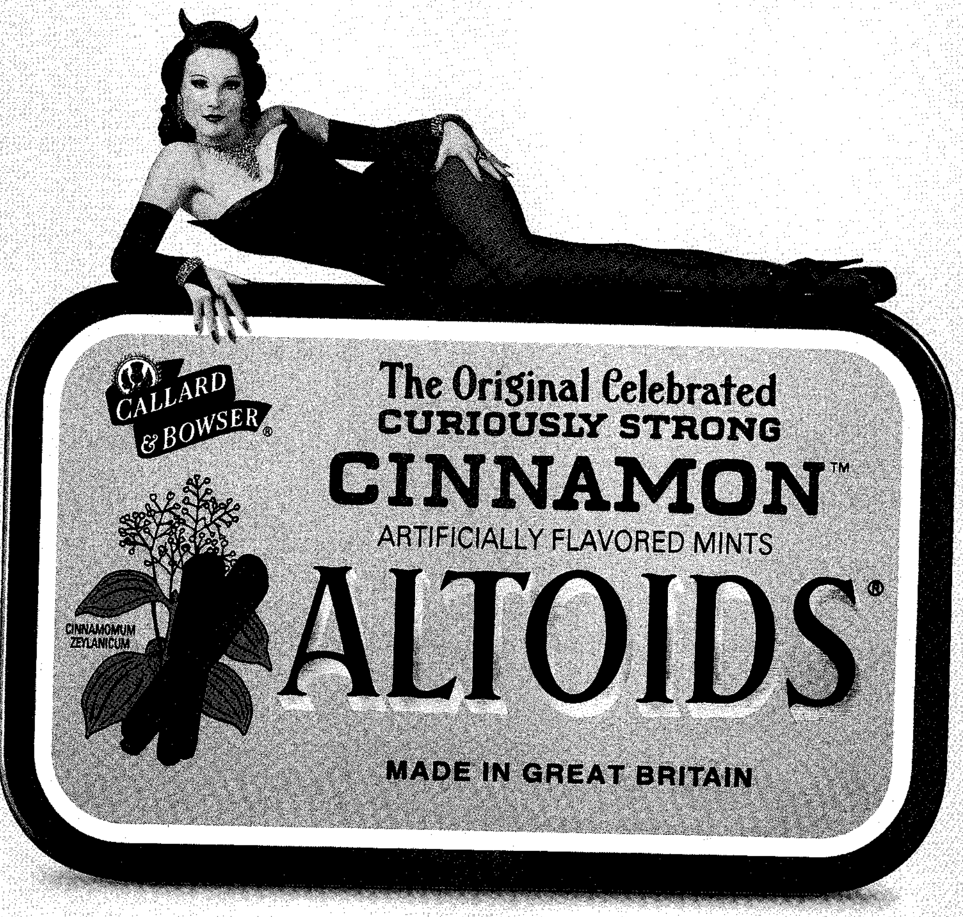
In "The Taste of Others," a factory owner in the provincial French city of Rouen, who is unhappily married and indifferent to most things except business, gets dragged by his wife to a local production of Racine's "Bérénice." The factory owner, Castella (Jean-Pierre Bacri), doesn't understand the play; in fact, he hates the theatre. But something in the lead actress's appearance and impassioned performance—her serious brow, her low, throbbing voice—moves him to tears, and he becomes devoted to her. The actress, Clara (Anne Alvaro), a refined, lonely woman, hangs out with the other actors and a few local artists, and she's appalled by her wealthy admirer, who tells blundering, unfunny jokes. "The Taste of Others," which is France's Oscar nominee for best foreign-language film, was written by Bacri and his partner, Agnès Jaoui, who directed the movie and also appears in it as a local bar girl—a free-living type who sleeps with both Castella's chauffeur and his bodyguard. The movie is about people's opinions of one another, and the way that prejudice and parochialism grow out of the complicity of taste. Like all bohemian and intellectual circles, the little group of actors and artists is held together by shared seriousness, shared pleasure; they accept the bar girl as a friend because she's fiercely independent and outspoken, but they can't accept the anxious-to-please philistine Castella, whom they insult to his face.

Bacri and Jaoui have written plays and films together; this is the first movie that Jaoui has directed, and she uses a plain technique and a simple frame, concentrating on two or three people at a time. There's something very charming in this French insistence that movies can be built out of the everyday stresses of social life and sexual temperament and such things as taste in paintings and jokes. "The Taste of Others" doesn't take any great risks, or go very deep, but it's an intelligent and pleasing movie about manners in both the smaller and larger senses: What makes a relationship or a social group succeed or fail? What makes a happy life possible? Bacri and Jaoui understand the necessary comforts of closed circles, but they also hate the petty-mindedness that goes with comfort. They believe in the sudden alteration in taste, which is sometimes called love, for without that change there is no true movement in life. Modest as it is, the movie might have pleased the woman who wrote "Pride and Prejudice." ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST


MIXED MARRIAGE
EPISODE 3: "IRREGARDLESS"
JESUS! Did you hear that?
No. What?
DAILY HERALD
That newscaster just said "IRREGARDLESS"!
So?
Doesn't that bother you?
No - why should it?
Well, I happen to think that newscasters should KNOW THE CORRECT WORD, THAT'S ALL!!!
What's it supposed to be, "disregardless"?
SPORTS
All I'm saying is that people who say "irregardless" are TOTAL CRETINS!
LOTS of people say "irregardless."
That's exactly my point! "LOTS" of people ARE cretins!!!
Look: just because a person doesn't have "BOOK SMARTS" doesn't mean he or she is STUPID!
That newscaster might have a lot of EMOTIONAL intelligence!
SPORTS
May I interject one teensy-weensy thought?
Go ahead!
SPORTS
Emotional intelligence is CRAP!!!
R. Chast

I'VE GOT THE HOTS FOR YOU.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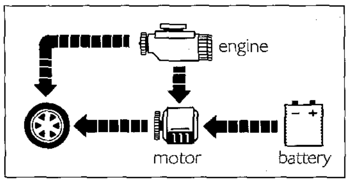

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